

955

H3247

li

The HART SERIES



LIL The DANCING GIRL

UC-NRLF



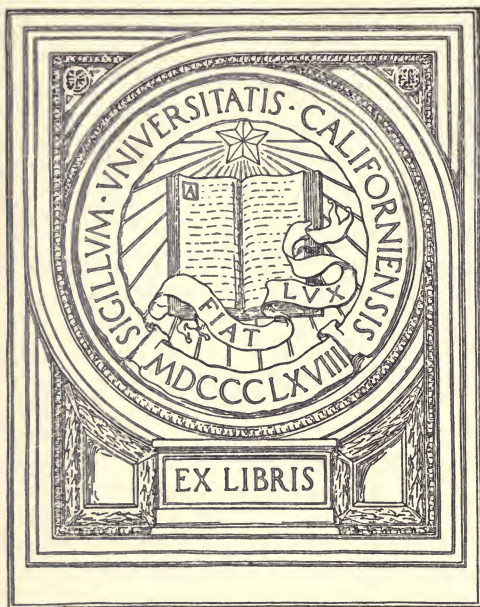
\$B 251 175



by
**CAROLINE
HART**

PRICE
15¢

The ARTHUR WESTBROOK Company
CLEVELAND, U. S. A.



EX LIBRIS

955
H3247
li

LIL, THE DANCING GIRL

REMAINS OF
CAROLINE HART

MISS CAROLINE HART

HART SERIES



NUMBER 3

Published by
THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY
CLEVELAND, U. S. A.

NO. 1710
1910
(Printed in the United States of America)

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Chapter I	5
Chapter II	11
Chapter III	18
Chapter IV	24
Chapter V	31
Chapter VI	37
Chapter VII	43
Chapter VIII	50
Chapter IX	56
Chapter X	62
Chapter XI	69
Chapter XII	75
Chapter XIII	81
Chapter XIV	87
Chapter XV	93
Chapter XVI	99
Chapter XVII	105
Chapter XVIII	114
Chapter XIX	119
Chapter XX	125
Chapter XXI	132
Chapter XXII	139
Chapter XXIII	145
Chapter XXIV	151
Chapter XXV	157
Chapter XXVI	163
Chapter XXVII	169
Chapter XXVIII	175
Chapter XXIX	182
Chapter XXX	191
Chapter XXXI	196
Chapter XXXII	202
Chapter XXXIII	209
Chapter XXXIV	215
Chapter XXXV	221
Chapter XXXVI	227
Chapter XXXVII	234

LIL, THE DANCING GIRL

—BY—

CAROLINE HART

CHAPTER I.

The little house was always in order, but it seemed that not a particle of dust rested upon anything on this great day. Everything looked new and singularly tidy in the parlor, where the chairs were placed closely against the wall; the highbacked sofa stood straight and forbidding in its corner; the table in the center of the floor so exact that the distance must have been measured from every side, and its books lying diagonally upon each corner with the lamp, clear as crystal in polish, in the middle. The melodeon stood open in one corner, but even its stops looked the reverse of inviting.

The windows were open, and outside the sunlight lay in great rifts about the garden, where the hollyhocks and sunflowers nodded lazily; but even the flowers had a prim, set look that was not usual to them in other places. Not that there were many of them. Old Jonathan Esmonde did not believe in them. Their gay coloring looked worldly and altogether too frivolous for this wicked world, and so old Jonathan not only did not encourage their cultivation, but

would not permit it. The hollyhock and sunflower he made an exception of, however, and a few of them glowed in the garden, where the sun beat down, un-reproved.

There was not even a balcony around the old country house. That seemed to Jonathan too much like comfort for this life, and the new furniture, which was stiff and prim-looking as it could be purchased, would never have been bought if he had had his way. But in this instance he did not, which was a most isolated exception.

"Lillian sent me the money," Mrs. Esmonde urged: "and now that she is coming home, we ought to have things fixed up a bit for her, you know, father. She will like to see the new furniture; and it is her own money."

"I don't like it!" exclaimed old Jonathan, drawing his brows together. "It is strange to me where Lillian gets the money. I can't afford it, and I've got as likely a farm as any in the neighborhood. Its strange where a chit of a girl like that gets the money!"

He repeated the words half musingly, but the little creature who had absorbed most of his ideas on primness and economy bridled at once.

"She works for it!" she cried indignantly. "You shall not speak of our Lillian, Jonathan Esmonde, as if she was not an honest girl! You know as well as I do that she teaches a day school in a big city, and that she gets sixty dollars a month fur doin' it!"

"Umph!" muttered Jonathan. "I never could see no sense in pannin' out so much money fur book learnin'."

"Well, if you can't, other folks does; and our Lillian is a good girl. She sent me the money for the furniture, father, and it ought to be bought."

"Well, buy it, then! But, mind you, I don't approve uv it at all, and you remember that! I don't believe in extravagance, and I don't believe in encouragin' her to spend money fur nothin'."

But poor little Mrs. Esmonde had obtained the concession, and that was all she desired; so she let the remainder of the speech alone, and she and Amy went to "town" and had the pleasure of buying the new furniture.

And now to-day Lillian was coming home. Even old Jonathan was putting on a clean shirt in honor of the occasion. Mrs. Esmonde had been ready for hours, and was bustling about the kitchen making sure that everything was ready which she remembered Lillian had liked in the old days. She wore a clean calico dress, with a stiff linen collar at her throat, and an apron that half covered her. Her hair was parted in the middle, and smoothed back behind her ears, with not a hair out of place.

She came out of the kitchen and went into the parlor to make sure that all was right there as a girl came down the stairs.

She was a peculiar-looking girl. Her hair was a reddish gold, such as the belle of our modern days envy—hair that would not consent to being smoothed back after the manner of her mother, but insisted upon breaking into little rebellious curls that were the despair of her father. Her eyes were dark as midnight, and contained an expression of constant pain and sadness that would have touched the coldest

heart. Her face was beautiful, but the little form was twisted and bent, and she held on with both hands to the rough balustrade of the stair-way in her painful descent.

The prim face of the woman relaxed somewhat as she gazed upon the child.

"Why didn't you wait until father or some one could help you, Amy!" she asked, more gently than she ever spoke to any one else. "You know how it always makes you suffer to come down by yourself."

"I couldn't wait!" answered Amy, feverishly. "I thought she might come and—and me be upstairs. She would think I wasn't glad to see her, then."

The woman tenderly passed her hand across the beautiful hair.

"No, she wouldn't; our Lillian loves you, Amy."

"I know she does!" cried the girl, eagerly. "She loves us all. Do you think I don't know? She works from morning until night there in the school—and it must be awfully hard on her—just to send us the money. You know how Lillian hates to be shut up from morning until night. She never could stand it here at home; she must always be out. She used to long for life, she said—long for life and action. I know it is hard upon her, mother."

"Yes; but our Lily is a good girl. We must all do something for our living."

"Not I, mother—not I! It seems to me sometimes as if every one of God's creatures is permitted to do something except me. I must stay here and drag and suffer, drag and suffer, until—"

There were tears of rebellion choking the pretty voice when Mrs. Esmonde interrupted:

"Hark! there are the wheels."

But it was not so much the rumbling of the wheels that she heard, but the creaking of the old spring-wagon which had been sent to the depot to meet Lillian.

Amy toiled painfully to the door, which Mrs. Esmonde had flung open, and stood there with the light breeze blowing her hair about her flushed, eager face. She knew exactly when the wagon came in at the gate, which she could not see, and she dragged herself wearily out into the garden and stood there.

Lillian was not long in coming. She walked quickly, and flung her arms lovingly about her mother's neck almost before the little woman realized that she had come at all. Then she threw herself upon Amy, passionately, straining the little creature to her heart, and kissing the upturned face again and again before she released the now smiling child.

"And where is father?" she asked, eagerly, turning to her mother. "Isn't he here to see me?"

"He will be in a minute. But turn around and let me look at you."

The girl turned to her with a laugh, and stood there silently for a moment.

She was like Amy in feature, save that her hair was darker. But there were the same great, dark eyes, the same sensitive mouth, the same exquisite complexion, but— Well, there all the resemblance ended.

She was dressed plainly in a traveling costume; but about her there was an inexplicable something—an atmosphere, a manner—that stamped her as far from them as the poles are from each other. In

spite of the plainness of her attire, she was as stylish, as well groomed, as *chic* as the most admired of society belles. There was nothing of the country-bred young Miss about her, and Mrs. Esmonde seemed to realize that as she gazed.

"You have changed, Lillian," she said, slowly; "you don't look like you did at all."

The girl colored slightly.

"Nonsense, mother!" she cried, gayly. "My hair is exactly the same shade, my eyes and my complexion are not altered; I am the same in everything."

The good woman shook her head.

"No," she answered, firmly. "I don't say but you look better for the change, but it's there, all the same. I can't tell you; I don't know enough, maybe. It ain't in the hair and eyes and complexion; but it's there ain't it, Amy?"

"She's the most beautiful girl in all the world, and she always was the most beautiful!" cried the child passionately, throwing her arms about her sister again. "Oh, Lillian, it has been so lonely without you, dear—so bitterly lonely! And now that I have you, I don't see how I can ever let you go again! There used to be something to do when you were here; and if there wasn't, you invented something; but now the days do nothing but drag into night, and the nights do nothing but drag into day. But you won't go again—you won't go, will you, Lily? Or, if you do, you will take me with you?"

The girl's face changed curiously. A quick flush mounted to the temples, then receded, leaving her paler than before; there was a troubled light in her eyes, and she bent her head to hide their expression

from her sister and her mother as she tenderly stroked Amy's hair.

"We won't talk of that now, dear," she whispered. "I must see father."

The child glanced up eagerly.

"And be sure you make him let us go to town to-morrow!" she cried, half breathlessly. "There's to be a fair in the Methodist church. I never attended a fair in my life, Lillian, and they say this one is to be grand. Be sure you make him let us go, won't you?"

The elder girl nodded, her eyes filling with tears. In spite of the fact that she had lived the greater part of her life in that family, it seemed a strange thing to her that her sister should really take an interest in church fairs; but she whispered brightly:

"You shall go; rest easy about that. Sh! there he is!"

CHAPTER II.

The "town" to which Amy Esmonde had referred, and which was always spoken of in a way that was most indefinite to the rest of the world, consisted of perhaps eight hundred inhabitants, and was by no means what is termed "flourishing" at that. There was no business to speak of. "Storekeepers" sat around outside on boxes and barrels for the greater part of the day, their principal occupation being whittling sticks or chewing toothpicks.

A church fair, therefore, was looked upon as the

greatest possible dissipation, and the little frame structure was crowded to its utmost capacity during the day and evening of the fair.

Pretty, bright-cheeked country damsels, in their beribboned lawns, flitted in and out of the throngs, and even though there were evidences of perspiration and weariness, there was not one of them but would have told you she was having "just the loveliest time that ever could be imagined."

It was upon that scene that Lillian Esmonde gazed, scarcely seeing the old friends that flocked about her, and answering their never-ending questions in a vague sort of way, endeavoring to conceal the shivers that ran over her.

"Is it possible," she queried, mentally, "that I ever could have been interested in such things as this? Amy's eyes are sparkling as mine never did under a glass of champagne, and— Great heavens! I wonder what these people would say to a night at the— Pough! what am I saying? This is a time to forget all that. Oh, if I only could for just half an hour! If I could only be the simple-hearted country girl that I was two little years ago! But would I, even if I could?"

She laughed slightly. There was just a tiny strain of bitterness and cynicism in it, but the simple-minded country folk did not hear that. They never read between the lines.

"It must be right hard on ye, now ain't it?" Mrs. Stout had been saying. "I don't think I could ever bear to be a-settin' all day long a-teachin' children. They air so thick-headed, the most uv 'em."

It was then that Lillian laughed

"I have not found it so," she answered. "It seems to me that learning comes naturally enough to these people whom I have tried to teach. I rather think I have been the one to learn."

Mrs. Stout looked at her a trifle dubiously, and sighed.

"Lillian is changed!" she muttered, mentally. "There ain't no doubt uv that. She's grow'd to be a fine young lady, but—well, old Jonathan Esmonde ain't to be envied, *I don't* think."

After a little pause, she exclaimed aloud:

"La! there comes the Langfords! Now, I wonder what under the sun fetched them here."

"Who are the Langfords?" asked Lillian, more for the purpose of making conversation than anything else.

"Ain't you heard? Why, they're the new swells that's took the old Breckenridge farm—bought it, they say. They only stay there fur the summer, and have the house full of company all the time. Fur my part, I'd think they'd be eat ouden house an' home. They go to the Episcopal church when they go at all. There ain't nobody around here as likes 'em much. Nobody don't seem to be good enough fur 'em. That's Miss Langford a-gettin' ouden that there contraphsion now. The Lord knows what you call it."

Lillian was standing outside the door of the church under the shade of a great old oak-tree. The end of her white parasol was stuck into the ground at her feet. Her eyes had wandered listlessly toward the party which was drawing up before the church, but

as she looked, her expression changed to one of interest.

The young lady to whom Mrs. Stout had referred was undeniably handsome. She was of the empress type, rather large and commanding. Her eyes were gray, her hair dark, her carriage superb. She was gowned in an organdie lawn that was not intended to be overpowering in its elegance, and yet there was something so different in its appearance from those surrounding her, that it was like a Worth silk beside a cotton dress.

Beside her was a man in white flannels, a tall, dark man with a face full of passionate beauty, and yet a strong, well-chiseled face, a man who might have been taken for a poet one moment and a soldier the next.

"That's one of the visitors," Mrs. Stout exclaimed, as he leaped to the ground and put up his hands to assist Miss Langford.

There was a smile in his eyes as he lifted her carefully beside him that Lillian saw even at that distance, and an expression of even greater interest dawned in her eyes.

"Sweethearts!" she murmured, below her breath. "This promises better than I thought."

At that moment Miss Langford evidently caught sight of her, for she started slightly, then looked puzzled. She evidently said something to her companion, for he too glanced in Lillian's direction. He said something below his breath, then looked again.

A burning flush crept from Lillian's throat to brow, and her eyes fell.

"Is it possible that she has recognized me?" was the

thought that flashed through her brain. "Is it possible that—"

But she flung up her head defiantly and put the thought from her as the two passed into the building.

"There are others of the party," Mrs. Stout whispered. "That feller in front there is Miss Langford's brother; Clinton, I think his name is. And that one behind is another visitor; and the young lady is visitin', too. I declare, they must be worth a mint o' money t' stand it! City folks thinks them in the country kin stand sponging furever, I reckon!"

Almost before the remarks had ceased, Miss Langford had come to the door again, accompanied by the gentleman and Mrs. Marsh, a tall, angular woman, the mother of six children, but who looked more like an old maid than a matron.

"Lillian! Lillian Esmonde, I say, come here!" she cried, loudly. "Miss Langford wants to know you, an' I'm sure the wish is mutual."

She smiled affably, as if pleased with herself and the successful speech she had made; then, as Lillian joined her, she said:

"Miss Langford, this is Miss Esmonde, the darter uv ole Jonathan Esmonde. She outgrewed our little town of Burton, and went away to teach school in New York. She's done come back a fine lady now, and one I'm sure Jonathan Esmonde ought to be proud of."

Lillian's cheeks flamed again, but there was a merry twinkle in Miss Langford's eyes as she put out her hand cordially.

"I am so glad to meet you, Miss Esmonde!" she exclaimed, lightly. "I quite agree with Mrs. Marsh

about Jonathan Esmonde's pride. Allow me to introduce my friend, will you not? Miss Esmonde, Mr. Sumner."

She glanced into the handsome eyes above her and bowed, noting the puzzled expression in them, and shrinking somewhat for a moment, only to straighten herself with an assumption of indifference.

"Somehow Miss Esmonde's face is familiar to me," exclaimed Sumner, regarding her with interest. "Is it not possible that we have met before?"

"I believe not," answered Lillian, her voice cool and dainty. "I have never entered the 'social swim' of New York. I presume you are from New York."

"Oh, yes," returned Miss Langford. "We live there in winter. I thought for a moment that I had seen you; but, of course, it was only a resemblance of some sort. It is horrid bad for me to see resemblances; but one can't always help it, you know. Are you selling anything to-day, Miss Esmonde, or only, like ourselves, purchasers?"

"My sister has a flower-table," she replied. "I may assist her when she grows tired!"

"Let us go and buy her out, then her task will be completed," laughed Sumner. "It will also save you later in the day."

"There are Clinton and the others," exclaimed Miss Langford. "Let us wait for them."

They came up at that moment, and were presented to Lillian.

"Come," cried Miss Langford, gayly; "we are going to buy Miss Esmonde off from making a martyr of herself selling, so that she can make one of herself eating. We'll purchase all the flowers then we'll make

children of ourselves and eat ice-cream until we can't eat any more."

"I draw the line at eating ice-cream!" exclaimed Clinton Langford lazily.

"Very well," cried his sister, indifferently. "Then you may pay for what the rest of us eat. Come along, Miss Esmonde; show us where your sister's table is."

They entered the church together, and Lillian led the way to Amy's table. It seemed to her that the church fair was suddenly converted from a martyrdom in which she was sacrificing herself for the sake of her sister, to a veritable adventure, and a flush of excitement had mounted to her cheeks when she paused beside the little table.

Behind it Amy sat, her cheeks glowing, her eyes bright as stars above her little pink lawn gown, which Lillian had rendered decidedly tasteful with a few artistic touches. Her face was beautiful, and a smile of infinite compassion lighted the eyes of Philip Sumner as he stood up to acknowledge the introductions as her sister presented her to Miss Langford's party.

"We are going to sweep the whole table!" exclaimed Sumner, leaning toward her, "and then I'm going to carry you away to eat ice-cream! Will you come?"

As he received the child's delighted reply, he turned to Lillian.

"My little sister was—like her. She died two years ago. You will let me—love the little one, for her sake, will you not?"

Lillian did not reply, but there was a moisture in the eyes that destroyed the necessity for words.

CHAPTER III.

"I have heard a great deal of you to-day, Miss Esmonde. You seem to be of inexhaustible interest to the people of Burton."

There was a quizzical smile in the dark, poetic eyes of Philip Sumner as they gazed down at Lillian. They were standing alone under a great locust-tree near the river behind the church. The sun was setting in a huge fiery ball in the western sky, and the scene about the church was growing merrier than ever.

She glanced up at him, a shade of annoyance that she strove to conceal visible in her face.

"I hope you have not been distressed," she said, earnestly. "The people of Burton are not always considerate. They can never be made to understand that what is of interest to the individual is not to the world at large."

"Am I the world at large?" he asked, his smile fading somewhat or growing just a trifle tremulous. "I am afraid I have encouraged the gossips. I have been intensely interested, at all events. It isn't every day that a man hears of the brave struggle a little thing like you can make, and it makes a great hulking fellow, who has never done anything in his life, rather ashamed of himself when he considers what one small girl can accomplish."

"I am afraid they have greatly overestimated what I have done."

"I don't think so. It was a simple little story, after all. Only that of a wee woman who became desperate

under the circumscribed lines of a country existence. Only a frail child who felt that she was created for something better than mere vegetation, and would not consent to 'hide her light under a bushel,' but rather cut away, and faced life alone coolly and bravely. Only the story of a young creature who let herself adrift in this big, cruel world and faced the enemy—'temptation'—alone. But she knew her own strength. She went from this little village to a great city, and in less than two years, by her own industry and perseverance, she had established herself as a teacher in that great city, where so short a time before she had been absolutely unknown. And now she comes home to see mother, father, and little sister, who love her so truly and sincerely, to comfort and cheer their drooping spirits. It is a simple story, Miss Esmonde, but one in which I think the most stony heart would be interested. Certainly I have been—intensely so."

He had been looking over her head at the setting sun, but now he brought his eyes down to a level with her face.

Was it possible that there was a look of crimson shame upon it, or had the reflection of the sun become entangled in his vision, making every object red?

"I hope I have not offended you!" he exclaimed, humbly.

She laughed slightly. There was a strained sound in it, but she controlled it admirably.

"I am not offended, Mr. Sumner, only amused," she answered, covering her embarrassment by not looking at him. "You must not believe all that has been told you."

"What part of it is untrue?" he asked, boldly. . . .
She colored again.

"The motives of generosity and the courage which you have attributed to me," she replied, hesitatingly. "I went because the confining life became hateful to me. I went because action was a necessity and the stagnation here stifled me. I should have gone mad to have continued in the eternal silence of the farm. I went because I was selfish, because I could not endure the life they lived. I did not listen to the voices of those who loved me, but I went regardless of them. Do you call that brave?"

"Yes," he answered, gravely. "You know better than those that surround you. There was a work for you to do, and you have done it nobly. There is no more noble calling in life than teaching. It is a continual charity, and one I admire above and beyond all others. If I had had the selection of a vocation for you in life, it would have been that of teacher. Ah! I have heard so much of you, so much that is tender and true and lovely. Forgive me. Your little sister and I have become great friends. She has told me all about the home life, and how good you are; how easy you have made it for her and the little mother, and I can so readily believe it of you. Her love for you is nothing short of worship, Miss Esmonde. It is beautiful, it is heavenly. It is something that will prove a talisman to you, for it would be worse than murder of the soul to deceive an adoration like that!"

She was looking beyond him, a pained expression upon her countenance which he could not quite trans-

late. The crimson had all faded from her face, and it had grown strangely white.

She did not reply to him, and after a little pause he exclaimed in a changed tone:

"Do you know what she has promised me?"

Lillian started slightly and looked at him.

"Promised you?" she repeated, rather vaguely.

"Yes. She has promised that I may call at your home. Will you repeat the promise, Miss Esmonde?"

"I—I don't think—you will care to—to come," she stammered.

"But indeed—indeed I shall!" he exclaimed, earnestly. "I don't want to offend you. Some way, you are different to me from other girls. I don't know just exactly what I should say to you. You are so pure, so stainless. I have never known any one quite like you, Miss Esmonde, and it is not extraordinary that I should wish to become better acquainted, is it? Will you not grant me the privilege?"

"You will be—disappointed," she cried out, painfully. "Amy has made you—has made you believe many things of me that are not true, and—and—"

She did not seem capable of completing the sentence. He leaned a trifle towards her, and as he did so, took a white rose from her hair that Clinton Langford had put there half an hour before.

"I am like Amy," he answered, with a smile. "Nothing could make me believe that. I fancy that I was interested in her because of her likeness to my little dead sister; but—I loved her—because she talked of—you to me—afterward. Will you give me this rose, Miss Esmonde?"

He held the bud in his hand, but it was into her eyes that he looked. A sweet flush stained her cheeks. She tried to release herself from the fascination of his eyes, but they held her. There was a depth of poetry in them that entranced her. She would have taken the rose from him if the power had been left her, but to save her life she could not.

She smiled. Then she watched him put the rose in a note-book he carried, opposite the date. When it was safely in his pocket, he said quietly:

"But you have not accorded the other permission. I asked Amy if I might not call; I entreat it of you."

"You will not care to come!" she cried out, passionately, as if struggling to free herself from a dangerous fascination. "You will not care to come! It is not what you have been accustomed to. It is all so stiff, so formal, so—so—"

"What shall I care for that?" he asked, almost tenderly. "It is not to see your home, it is to see you, Miss Esmonde. Ah! don't you understand what this day has been to me? I don't dare tell you, lest you take fright and refuse to let me see you again; but it is the promise of heaven to me. Little one—let me come."

She tried, but there was something that compelled her in the handsome face bent above her. She hesitated, but she had not the strength to resist.

"If you will," she answered in a tone so low that he scarcely heard.

There was no triumph in his expression over the concession, but only gladness, and she drew a long sigh.

"Thank you," he said in a tone that fitted her own. "I shall try to deserve the confidence you have shown me. Perhaps when you know me better, you will let me call myself your friend. Ah, little one, man can have no greater honor conferred upon him than the friendship of a pure, true little thing like you."

But there was something more than friendship in the look that was in the poetic eyes, something more than friendship even in those first hours, and Lillian saw it.

She lifted herself up suddenly, and exclaimed almost joyfully:

"There is Miss Langford beckoning to you. You must go."

"Must I?"

"You know it."

"I obey—you, as I always shall. May I have just five minutes alone with you again this evening?"

"Yes; but go!"

He smiled and went.

With almost wild passion, she turned and walked rapidly in the direction of the river. She leaned against a tree, and for the first time allowed her expression full play. It was desperate.

"What a fraud I am!" she cried out, pressing her interlaced fingers against her eyes. "What a hypocrite and fraud! How these people would despise me if they knew the truth! Would that man care to come to the house if he knew me for what I am? Would his friends receive me? Pough! what do I care? It is only for one summer. He will go away again and think nothing of the little 'school teacher' whom he met in the woods!" bitterly "If any one suffers, it

will only be I. For Amy's sake and the poor little mother I must keep this secret that seems strangling me, I will do it—I swear I will, let the consequences be what they may! I wish to Heaven I had not persuaded father to let us come to-day! I wish—My God! who is that?"

Almost at her feet a man had landed his little birch-bark canoe, and as she spoke to herself he sprung out, muttering a curse as his foot came in contact with the mud upon the river's edge.

She would have taken to her heels and fled, but that surprise, or something worse, held her spellbound, and suddenly he glanced up.

First an expression of surprise dawned upon his face; incredulity, then pleasure.

"What! is it possible?" he cried, springing toward her. "Who, in Heaven's name, would ever have expected to find you in this out-of-the-way place—you, of all people in the world? I must be mistaken yet. It is a sprite, or the vision my imagination has conjured. It can't really be Lil, our lovely dancing-girl!"

CHAPTER IV.

"For the love of heaven, hush!" she cried looking furtively over her shoulder as the criminal does who fears detection. "How came you here? And why have you come?"

He had reached her side and laughed lightly as she drew her hand from him.

"That is not a very cordial welcome!" he exclaimed,

lightly. "Here am I, so delighted to see you that I can scarcely control the exuberance of my joy, and you dash my enthusiasm with ice-water in that heartless way! I say, Lil, aren't you glad to see me?"

"No!" she cried, her white, passionate face turned toward him, "no! I hoped for one little month to drop the old life behind me, to be what these good people think me, and you have come to bring up the ghost of the detestable past—the forecast of the odious future that lies before me! Why are you here?"

He looked at her a trifle incredulously for a moment, then answered:

"I am visiting at the Breckenridge farm. The others are all here, but a matter of business delayed me. I thought I should be out of it, but got off sooner than I expected, and rowed down, never dreaming of my good fortune. Come, Lil, cut all this nonsense, and be the jolly girl who has got into the veins of blood of every man in New York! Surely you are not going to turn Quakeress at this late date!"

She shuddered.

"Don't call me by that odious name!" she exclaimed, glancing over her shoulder again. "I can't bear it here. Listen to me, Kirk. You once told me—well, no matter what nonsense, but it leads me to believe that I can ask a favor of you now."

"You bet you can!"

"It is only this: don't allow any one here to suspect that you ever saw me before."

"What! And lose the chance of your society in this God-forsaken hole? Not for silver or gold! I came down here simply because I couldn't get out of it, expecting to be buried alive for the space of my

visit, and, lo! here you turn up at the most opportune of moments to save me from an untimely grave. By Jove! I never had such reason to thank my lucky stars before in my life. And here you ask me to pretend that I don't know you—you, of all people in the world!"

"Be serious for a moment if you can!" she exclaimed, the agony in her voice not to be mistaken. "Listen to me. This is no light matter, but one of—more than life to me. I wish I could make you understand the situation in which I was placed; but I never could—no one ever would. My father was a stern, hard man who saw nothing but eternal condemnation in any amusement whatever. He ground us down, making us work from dawn till dark, clothed in the coarsest of raiment. A laugh met with a rebuke, a light word with a frown. There was nothing but drudgery from daylight until night, and no recompense save coldness and reproof. I could not bear it. It seemed to me that my hungering heart was burning out my life. I could not endure it! and while I loved my mother and sister with a passion such as few girls can feel, for my whole empty heart was with them, I determined that I would cut away. It would be useless to attempt to describe the scene when I told father that I intended to go. He predicted failure for me, and that I would crawl to his door, entreating to be taken back, but said that I need not come, that I should never be received. With my mother's tears, my sister's entreaties, and my father's curses in my ears, I went. I would have died by slowest torture before I would have confessed myself a failure, before I would have asked for bread at his hands!

"Well, what would you have expected of a country girl with little education and less knowledge of the world? I soon saw starvation, or worse, before me. I tried every way—even to be a domestic in some family, but I was too inexperienced for that. One night—God knows how it happened—I danced in the parlor of the woman who had taken me in temporarily. There was a man there who was manager of a small dancing-hall. He offered me an engagement. I seized upon it as a drowning man does at a straw. It kept me from utter despair.

"With shamed face I went to the little place and danced. I don't know how it happened, but I succeeded. Some one saw me who recognized that I had talent. You know old Colonel Chetwynd. He came to me and offered to teach me, to provide what was necessary for a better engagement than I then filled. I accepted the offer simply because it was better than the position I then held, and because it was either that or starvation.

"And you must know what the situation at home was. Had I told my father the truth, had I let him know that I was dancing for my living, he would never have allowed either my mother or my sister to recognize me. Even they, brought up as they have been, having received their thoughts and ideas from him and the world that surrounds them, would have believed me lost eternally, and would have turned from me with loathing and contempt.

"I could not bear it. I know they are only simple country folk—perhaps to you not worth consideration at all, but they are all I have in life. They are my mother and my sister. These people are those who

have known me from the cradle, and to have them turn from me with contempt would be more than I could bear. I told them that I was teaching school."

She paused with bowed head, and after a moment a roar of laughter burst from Kirk Maitland's lips.

Lillian looked up appealingly, and put out her hand with a little shuddering gesture.

"Don't!" she moaned. "It is like stepping on some sacred dead thing to me. I know you will think the lie unworthy of me, but I am so—ashamed."

"And that is the reason you don't want me to appear to know you?"

"That is the reason."

"But the Langfords are all here. In fact, I am visiting them; and Philip Sumner is here. They have all seen you dance."

"But none of them have recognized me. They have only seen me, and would never connect a little country school-teacher with Lil, the dancing-girl."

The last words were uttered in a low tone so filled with shame, of almost horror, that another man might have been touched; but not so Kirk Maitland. He would have laughed again but that he did not wish to offend her.

"If I consent to this absurdity, then," he said, with affected plaintiveness—"then there will be no champagne suppers, no drives, no dancing, but only just the demure companionship of a little school-teacher. I call that hard lines, Lil."

"Oh, don't!" she moaned, "for the love of heaven, don't! Tell me that you will do what I ask!"

"Let's make a compact. I agree, with a providing clause. You did not treat me very well in New York

last winter. On the contrary, several of the fellows were laughing at me because you snubbed me once or twice. Now, I promise to be as good—well, as any of those youngsters you have been teaching, if you will—well, agree to be kinder to me in future. Is it a bargain, Lil?"

He looked at her. The expression of his countenance was not good to see. She knew perfectly well that she was placing herself in his power, that she was doing something that she might have cause to regret to the last day of her life; but she was terribly in earnest. She would rather have died than have had those people know that she was a fraud, a hypocrite; that the very virtues for which they had commended her and set her upon a pinnacle were lies and cheats.

And then suddenly another thought came to her; it was of Philip Sumner.

She put up her hand suddenly and caught her throat; then she whispered, hoarsely:

"I—I have never meant to—to be unkind to you. I am willing to—do anything that you may ask."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Then what is it that will be expected of me? I am to bow modestly and indifferently when some one presents me to you—as some one must, you know, or I should have to kick over the whole bargain. But I suppose it won't create comment if I at once proceed to fall head over ears in love with the village beauty, will it?"

She shivered again.

"Then I have your promise?" she asked, unable to reply to him. "You will not betray me?"

"You have my promise to fall in love with you," he answered. "No, of course I shall not betray you—

there, now! You are not like yourself at all! Drop the tragic, Lil; it isn't in your line a bit. You are not natural without your heels in the air. How long are you going to stay in this confounded hole? Let's cut it in a week, and get back to freedom and champagne."

She tried to conceal the look of disgust that crept over her face, but it was almost impossible. She had never liked the man, and now to be forced to share the secret of her life with him was almost more than she could bear; but she controlled herself, as she knew she must, and answered:

"It is impossible at present. I am going back to the church now. Don't come at once."

"I understand. You may count upon me to play my part well. Ta-ta for the present. This is a greater lark than I expected in this foreign country."

She left him without waiting to hear more, and hurried away, feeling that another word would destroy her self-control.

He stood for a few moments where she had left him, leaning against the locust-tree where Philip Sumner had stood.

"'Pon my soul!" he ejaculated. "Who would have ever thought of a situation like this? Kirk, old boy, you are in a barrel of luck; The little princess cut me last winter, and the fellows never ceased guying; but hanged if I haven't got her now! Everything comes to him who knows how to wait, and I've got my lady just where I want her. She'll dance to my music now, or Kirk Maitland is away off in his reckoning!"

CHAPTER V.

The third week of Lillian's visit was drawing to an end.

There had been moments when it seemed to her that the entire happiness of her life had been crowded into those few days, and then a burning shame would stain her beautiful cheeks crimson as she remembered the lie she was living, the false position that she occupied.

Philip Sumner had called at the little farm-house, not once alone, but often, never seeming to recognize the stiffness or discomfort of the place, but regarding it lightly, perhaps pleased that this girl in whom he was so deeply interested had been brought up under such strict lines. Kirk Maitland came, too, and it was on these occasions most that Lillian seemed to realize all the falsity of her position, and she grew to detest him as if he were the cause of the self-loathing that oppressed her.

Old Jonathan Esmonde did not approve of the visits of the young swells, as he chose to call them, in the least; but he was proud of Lillian and her success as a teacher, and when she insisted, he yielded. It was an extraordinary thing for him to do, but he explained his good nature rather apologetically by saying:

"I suppose some recreation is due you when you air shet up in a school-room all day earnin' money at other times. There ain't much recreation in teachin' thick-skulled young ones."

And so Philip Sumner and Kirk Maitland continued to come.

There was but one more week left to her of that freedom—which was not freedom, after all, on account of the presence of Kirk Maitland—until she saw that she would be compelled to return to the life which she had never liked, and which she now thoroughly detested; but when she had read Chetwynd's letter one morning, urging her not to overstay her time by one moment, but rather to cut it short, if that were possible, she shrugged her shoulders bitterly.

"I've got to go!" she muttered, fiercely, crushing the letter in her hand. "It's the penalty exacted for a lie. I've got to go back and dance and smile. Well, what of that? Could I better endure that father should know? that he should separate me from mother and Amy? Philip Sumner would despise me. He would turn away, as he will do anyway, when he knows! Pouf! I am a fool. I will go on, accept the crumbs that fall to my lot, and let fate take care of itself. After all, I did not make my life. It was the only chance I had, and it was either that or—dishonor. But is not this dishonor? My father would not know what Kirk Maitland meant if he should say, 'Your daughter is Lil the dancing-girl,' and yet I believe I had rather a thousand times die than hear it spoken! There is no help for me. It is the penalty of a lie. The net will draw tighter and tighter until—"

The sentence was broken by the entrance of Amy. She was excited, and limped into the room in greater haste than she usually allowed herself.

"Quick, Lillian!" she gasped. "They are coming!"
"Who?" asked Lillian, striving to smooth the expression out of her forehead with her fingers, which she feared would attract her sister's attention.

"Why, Miss Langford and Kirk Maitland. I think Mr. Sumner is on horseback just behind, but I couldn't see. They are coming here."

"Miss Langford?"

"Yes; they've already passed the gate. I wonder what made her call?"

"Perhaps to see us," answered Lillian, with a smile. "That is what people usually call for, is it not?"

"Yes; but she's been so stiff and nasty since that day at the fair that I never thought she'd come. There's Mr. Sumner now. How lovely you look with that flush on your cheeks! You are a thousand times prettier than she is. Oh, Lillian, I wish Mr. Sumner would marry you, so that you would never have to teach those wretched children again!"

"Hush!" cried the elder girl, almost savagely. "You must not say that. I would—would not marry Mr. Sumner if—if—well, if he should ask me!"

"Why not?"

But Lillian made no reply. She turned away hastily, and went toward the door, perhaps to conceal the expression which she could not control. Her heart beat to suffocation. For the first time she seemed to realize what it would be to part from Philip Sumner. For the first time she seemed really to understand why those three weeks seemed to form a turning-point in her whole life.

She went down-stairs to receive her guests in the stiff, prim little parlor, which she had not tried to rearrange because of the impossibility of making it look better.

She was effusive in a well-bred way to Miss Lang-

ford, friendly in her greeting to Kirk Maitland, and coldly haughty to Philip Sumner.

He looked surprised and pained, but she turned away to Miss Langford, and did not look at him unless occasion demanded it.

"You were courageous to venture out to-day," she said to Miss Langford. "It is the hottest of the season, I think."

"And in spite of that fact, Mr. Sumner and Mr. Maitland tell me that you return to New York next week. Is it true?"

"Unfortunately, yes. We bread-winners are never our own masters."

There was a bitterness in her tone that surprised Sumner, but he had not recovered from the coldness of his reception, and said nothing.

It was Miss Langford who continued:

"I didn't know there were any schools open at this season of the year. I thought every one was out of town."

Lillian colored. She could not look at Miss Langford without seeing Kirk Maitland, and she observed the curious, quizzical smile upon his face.

"They are not open yet," she answered, boldly, "but there are many things that demand attention besides the mere act of teaching. There are examinations to stand and positions to secure."

"Isn't that done at the close of the school?"

"Not always."

"Well, you see, I know so little about those things. It is dreadfully trying, to think of a woman battling with the world, and it is tremendously gratifying when she succeeds."

"Particularly in the line that Miss Esmonde has chosen," said Sumner, quietly.

Kirk Maitland laughed outright, and Lillian shot him a glance which pulled him up suddenly.

"It always seems so absurd to me to think of Miss Esmonde as a demure little school-teacher," he explained, "that I can never keep from laughing. I should think all the boys would fall so desperately in love with her that there would be no chance of teaching them anything beyond sentiment."

Amy entered at that moment and stopped a subject that was growing painful to Lillian.

The conversation was general for a moment, then Miss Langford exclaimed:

"We are going to have a little dance to-morrow night, Miss Esmonde, and we have braved the heat to come over and ask you to join us. It is only a small affair, with a few of the neighbors asked, but it would be most incomplete without your presence and that of little Amy. You will both come, will you not?"

"It is so kind of you," answered Lillian, coloring deeply, "But I'm afraid—"

"Don't say no, Lillian!" cried Amy, excitedly. "You know father will let us if we ask him! Do let us go, Lillian. I was never at a dance in all my life."

Lillian glanced at the pleading, wistful face half imploringly. It seemed to her that she could not enter the house of that woman under the circumstances, under that lie that she was living. She knew how girls of her class—dancing-girls—were looked upon in society, and she felt as a burglar might when he commits his first offense through a fancied necessity. And yet she longed to go for the child's sake, the little one

whose life was so empty, who knew nothing but pain.

"Father—would not—consent," she murmured; but Amy cried out:

"Ask him! Only ask him! Oh, Lily, I would give anything to go!"

"Do ask him!" exclaimed Miss Langford, lazily fanning herself. "The dance will be quite spoiled without you."

"And Lillian dances so beautifully!" exclaimed Amy, enthusiastically. "She used to be always dancing—under the apple-trees, in the hay-loft, anywhere that she could be sure father would not see, but now she never will any more. She can dance lovely, Miss Langford."

"Indeed she can!" remarked Maitland, serenely, watching the angry color leap to Lil's cheeks.

"How do you know?" demanded Amy.

"I only fancy," returned Maitland. "Every graceful girl dances well."

"But not so well as Lillian. Do say you will go, dear."

"For your sake."

The words were spoken gently, but the cry of the heart was fierce.

"What do I care?" she was saying, mentally. "It can do no more harm than has been done already. It will give that poor, yearning child one evening of pleasure, or, rather, she fancies it will, which is quite the same thing. After all, what can it matter? My God, what does anything matter?"

And then aloud, rather recklessly, she exclaimed:

"Thank you, Miss Langford. I hope I have not

seemed ungrateful for the invitation. I am sure I shall enjoy it quite as much as Amy will."

CHAPTER VI.

There was never anything simpler than the costume worn by Lillian to the dance given by Miss Langford—only a little mull trimmed with inexpensive lace—and yet one of the sirens that so fascinated the olden Greeks could not have been more lovely than she.

Amy gazed at her with an admiration that was positively servile, as they were being driven over in the creaky old spring wagon.

"You are so beautiful that you take my breath away!" she exclaimed at last, never removing her eyes from her sister's face. "Oh, Lillian! if only we were rich—if only you did not have to teach that dreadful school—how different life might be for us! But it is nothing but grind, grind from morning until night! What good is the world, after all? There is nothing in it but suffering and unhappiness."

"For shame, little pessimist!" exclaimed Lillian, tapping the flushed cheek reprovingly. "Finding fault with life at your age, and going to your first dance at the same moment!"

"But I can not forget that you leave me next week. I can not forget that I must go back to the same old loneliness, the same old despair. I know I'm only a hunchback, and that I should expect nothing better than what I have; but oh, Lily, I am so tired of the

stiffness, the terrible, never-ending grind, the unceasing complaints of father, the total lack of any interest whatever! It is all empty—so hideously empty that I feel sometimes as if every particle of heart and soul had been taken out of my body, and there was nothing left there but the bare shell. Forgive me, dear, but you are going away.”

There was a pathos in the last words that touched Lillian until the tears sprung to her eyes. It seemed to her that she would have given all she possessed at that moment if she could have promised to take her little sister with her. She slipped her arm about the child's waist and held her closely.

“But I will come again,” she whispered.

“Not for a year—a whole, endless year! Oh, Lily, take me with you—take me with you!”

Lillian did not reply. It seemed to her that if her life depended upon it, she could not. She kissed the child upon the cheek, and after a moment Amy went on:

“I think sometimes that if I had had a different father I might have been as other girls are, and I am sure that if my back had been different I should not be as I am. I might then have been like you. I have read in books where people were cured whose deformity was even worse than mine, and I have begged him to send me away; but he only answers with the old story of no money. And I know it isn't true, Lily—I know it isn't!”

There was a passion in the voice that Lillian had never heard there before. It seemed to arouse all her conscience more than ever.

"You would like to see a doctor, Amy?" she asked, huskily.

The child clasped her hands almost fiercely there in the moonlight.

"*Like it!*" she cried, hoarsely. "Would the blind like to see? Would the starving like food? Would Tantalus have liked a drink of water? My God! I have crawled from my little, hard bed in the middle of the night and prayed for the opportunity that seemed so hopeless until it seemed to me that God surely must hear me, far away though I am. It would not be the same if I knew that father could not afford to send me; but money is more to him than I."

Lillian's beautiful cheeks were wet with tears.

"You shall go, Amy!" she cried, passionately, not pausing to consider the promise she was making.

For a moment the child started up in wild rapture; then she sunk back again, her expression more hopeless than before.

"I forgot how you have to work for your money," she said, hoarsely. "For a moment there seemed something like hope in the future; but—with only your little salary—I couldn't do it, Lily. I am not so selfish as that, dear."

Selfish! The girl's heart smote her. Her conscience cried out against her. She drew the child closely to her.

"You shall go," she whispered. "It is I who have been selfish—I who have been criminal in my negligence. I seek some way for an atonement that was denied me yesterday; and let the cost be to myself what it will, I will make it. If medical skill can make you what you crave to be, it shall be done."

"Lily—"

"Hush! There is the house!"

The child had not understood the words that her sister had spoken, and Lillian was thankful that it was too late to ask for explanation of them.

They were very silent as deaf old Reuben, their man-of-all-work, drove the wagon up to the place where they were to alight; but Lillian saw the dancing delight in her sister's eyes, and a little shiver passed over her as she thought of the promise she had made.

The grounds were like fairy-land to Amy, who had never seen anything like it in all her retired life, lighted as they were by fairy lamps and fantastic lanterns, but it was left for the house to dazzle her with splendors that she had never dreamed of.

As they stepped upon the broad balcony with its Eastern rugs, its dainty carved tables and great willow chairs, and glanced through the windows at the lights, the splendid old furniture the flowers and palms, she caught her breath hard, and paused, catching her sister's arm in a grasp like a vise.

"Did you ever see anything like it?" she panted.

But Lillian had forgotten to be astonished. She might have told of the balls which she had attended beside which this was merely the pretty country affair which Miss Langford had intended. But she only looked at Amy in absent-minded surprise.

"Like what?" she asked.

"This!" panted the child, with a comprehensive wave of the hand. "Don't you see? Cinderella at the princes' ball saw nothing like it!"

Lillian smiled sadly, but said nothing. She took the

little one by the arm, and together they entered the hall where the servant waited.

In a sort of maze of astonishment and bewildering delight Amy went through the rooms, scarcely realizing how the evening was passing.

She saw Lillian dancing. It seemed to her that in spite of all the beautiful dressing of Miss Langford and her friends, there was none in that great place that could compare with Lillian in her simple mull.

She had been sitting in a corner for a long time by herself, watching it all, when Philip Sumner came up to her.

"Are you enjoying it?" he asked kindly of her.

"Enjoying it?" she repeated. "It seems such a poor expression. I have never heard any music like that before. I never saw any flowers like these. I never watched any one dance except Lillian, and then there was no music only as she herself whistled. I wonder if you would think a person would enjoy a first glimpse of heaven?"

He sat down beside her. There was something infinitely pathetic in the little face that was upturned to him.

"And do you never have any desire to dance yourself?" he asked, gently.

He had expected the expression upon the little eager face to change to one of sadness, but its happiness deepened into a joyous smile.

"I shall some day!" she cried, turning her eyes from the thrilling scene to his face. "Do you know I have read of lots of people being cured who were afflicted as I am. I have so longed and prayed to go and try what they could do for me, but—father—could not

send—me. And now—Lillian is going to take me with her. Did you ever hear of anything so kind in all your life, Mr. Sumner? She only earns sixty dollars a month. It has always seemed a very great deal to me, but I know it will be little enough when she has to pay doctors' bills. I feel so selfish, but then—she is the best and dearest sister in all this world. Don't you think it is lovely of her, Mr. Sumner?"

But Philip did not have an opportunity to reply. Some one came for him, and he was forced to leave the little one alone, but her words kept ringing through his brain. He thought of them every time he glanced toward the sylph-like creature in white mull.

"Only sixty dollars a month teaching school," he kept repeating to himself, "yet she can sacrifice herself in order to help that poor little creature to something better in life. Working from early morning to late at night for a paltry pittance, and spending that upon a sick child to give her hope and comfort, while I, a great, hulking fellow, have more than I could spend in all my life, and never do good to any one. You must look to weak little women if you want to find heroism in this world. How beautiful she is, God bless her! And as noble as beautiful. It is characters like that that makes us worship her sex. I wish I could help her. I wish she would let me help her. But she won't. She isn't a bit ashamed of her stiff, formal, almost formidable little home. Her tenderness for her little, uneducated mother is exquisite, and her respect for that old bore of a father is beautiful. God! it is women like her that make you glad your mother and your wife must be of the same sex! It is little, pure, true things like

that that make you sorry God himself is not one of them. It would be so much easier to trust Him. I wish to heaven I were worthy; I'd ask her to be my wife. But I am not fit to make a mat for her small feet. How ashamed a fellow feels of himself and his past life in presence of a girl like her. Heigh-ho! I wish I'd been a better man. I'd ask her to be my wife, and— Hang it all! What a conceited puppy I am! A girl like that could never love a worthless nonentity like me."

CHAPTER VII.

Philip Sumner was not dancing. He had not done so since his last waltz with Lillian, and it seemed to him that he should never do so again without her as his partner. It was the poetry of motion to him, and a good dancer himself, he had enjoyed it is he had never done a waltz before.

She danced with another man shortly afterward, and Philip stood in the doorway watching her, thinking holy thoughts of the sweet, pure creature, and when she had finished and slipped from the room alone out into the grounds, he followed her.

He found her down among the locust-trees, whose trunks were wound with yellow honeysuckle. There was no difficulty in finding her, for the grounds were lighted not alone with a brilliant moon that was almost tropical in its splendor, but by the fairy lamps and lanterns as well.

She was leaning against one of the trees, whose

garlands of fragrant yellow honeysuckle formed a halo about her head. Her eyes were closed. The merry breeze had blown out the white mull skirt until it had become wrapped about the tree. Her arms were dropped beside her. It was an exquisite picture, and upon which Philip Sumner looked for some time before disturbing it.

"You are like a tired wood-nymph," he said, softly. "The fairies bring rest in the moon rays and place lamps at the feet of their goddess. I should like to be an artist to paint you as you are!"

She smiled up at him faintly.

"I believe I am tired," she answered. "I detest dancing. I sometimes wish I could never hear the strains of another orchestra as long as I live!"

Her tone had grown bitterly passionate as her words continued, and she observed his look of surprise.

"You would deprive others of the greatest pleasure in existence—that of being your partner in a waltz," he said, soothingly. "You will not be offended with me if I say that you are the finest waltzer I ever saw, will you?"

There was something cynical in her smile.

"It is a laudable ambition, is it not, to be a great dancer?"

She asked her question in a curious tone, and one which interested him in spite of the fact that he was not in an analytical mood.

"It is the personification of grace," he answered, thoughtfully.

She laughed, striving with all her might to make it sound natural, and yet fearing that he would hear the throbbing of her heart through it.

"And it suggests a capital means of livelihood," she exclaimed, the strained expression of her eyes veiled by lowered lids. "When I return to New York I shall study. There is more money in dancing than teaching school."

She flashed a glance at him, and saw him shrink almost as if he had heard some note of vulgarity from her perfect lips. Then he smiled, but not with mirth.

"Of course you only say that in jest," he said, softly; "and I was a dunce to be affected by it, but—you will laugh when I tell you that it actually hurt me. I had rather see you dead!"

"Why?"

"Ah, you don't know the class of women you mention, or you would not even speak of it in sport."

"But might not something good come out of Nazareth?"

The strained tone had returned to her voice. It was almost appealing.

"No!" he replied, speaking more earnestly than he had done before. "Contact must of necessity bring contamination. Don't even speak of it. It hurts me like a lash to hear such a thought from you, even when I know it is not serious. You are too pure, too—holy!"

She shivered slightly. Her face was deathly pale, but he saw only the effects of her fatigue and the moonlight.

"Come over this way. There is a seat," he said, almost tenderly, taking her hand and drawing it through his arm as he led her across the lawn. "There is something that I want to say to you. I don't know how to say it. I wish you would help me. I am

afraid of offending you, and yet—and yet. Can't you understand? I want to do something in life. I seem to lead such an aimless sort of an existence. To tell you the truth, little one, your brave, active life has made me ashamed of myself. I seem for the first time in my life to realize what a great clod I am, utterly useless, utterly good for nothing. I want you to help me. I want you to show me how to be like you, so good, so unselfish, so generous. I know it will seem a hopeless task to you, but—will you try?"

He looked down upon her with the same admiration and faith that one looks upon a statue of the Blessed Virgin, and she could have cried out in her agonized self-loathing. She had never felt her position of falsehood and shame before as she felt it then; and yet, if her very life depended upon it, she could not have told him the truth. Once her lips opened to speak it, but they closed again, and only the murmur left her soul:

"Death first! Death first!"

She looked up at him wistfully.

"I wish to heaven I were what you think me!" she cried out, helplessly. "I wish that I deserved the words that you have spoken."

"Deserved them!" he repeated. "There is nothing of good that you do not deserve. I know so much of your life, little one—so much more than you think. You will not be offended that I have allowed the country people to talk to me, will you? You will not think that I have rather encouraged them in the tales of your bravery and selfsacrifice? They told me of the life you lead, of the circumscribed lines about you, and of your breaking away. But they also told me of

the noble fight, of your constant care of mother and sister; and then Amy—do you think that little Amy has been silent when she had so eager a listener? She has told me only to-night of the noble resolve that you have made to take her to New York for medical attention. She told me of the wee salary that you expect to make pay the bills that doctors know so well how to charge, and— Won't you help me to tell you? Lily? You will let me call you Lily, will you not? It is the emblem of purity, and a perfect name for you. I want you—I want you to let me help you, dear. I entreat of you to make me happy in that way, to let me feel that I, too, am doing good!"

"You mean—about the—money?" she gasped.

"Yes, if you will put it that way," he answered, as if he were ashamed. "I—"

"Great heavens!" she interrupted, her face crimson with shame. "What will you think when you know, as you must? You must! Money? What is that to me? My God! if I were forced to slave from century's end to century's end for the bare sustenance of life, it would be better than this!"

He did not understand her words. He thought she referred to her father's harshness and to Amy's misfortune. He did not hear the despair in her tone, but only thought her excited, and slipped his arm about her soothingly.

"It is that of which I feel so sure," he said, gently. "Oh, Lily, I wish I were worthy to ask you to be my wife! There, little one; I did not mean to speak those words aloud; but my heart has spoken them so often that my tongue refuses to remain silent. I love you, darling! My life has not been a pure one. If I

could but cleanse it for your sweet sake, I should be the happiest man alive. But I am not conceited enough to think that you could ever care for me. Believe me, I should never ask it of you, little one, if you will only consent to let me help you. I know I should never have spoken of my love under the circumstances; that I should have been contented to love you to the day of my death in silence, but it was forced from me unawares; but I am quite conscious that there never could be any chance for me, Lily. I have never been fool enough to even hope for that. *Lily!*"

She had stopped suddenly in their walk, and with her hands pressed closely upon her breast, had looked up at him.

Something had suddenly dawned in her expression—a radiance, a light of brilliant joy, and he caught her hands and held them.

"Speak to me!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "My life has not been pure. I have lived as men usually do who regret it, in sackcloth and ashes, for the rest of their lives; but I love you; I love you with all the strength of my soul! If you will be my wife I will cherish you as woman was never cherished before. I will worship you for the sacrifice you make for me. Lily, Lily, there is something in your face—I don't know what—but it seems to tell me that you love me! For God's sake, speak! I feel as if my soul were suspended between heaven and hell, waiting for a word from you! Darling, what is it to be?"

But the reply came from another quarter. It was Miss Langford's voice that answered his pleading.

"We have been searching for you two all over the rooms and the grounds. We are going to dance the

Sir Roger de Coverley. Come! Miss Esmonde, I shall turn you over to Mr. Maitland and rob you of Mr. Sumner, lest you escape us again. Come, all of you."

There was an expression upon her countenance, a glitter in her gray eyes that was absolutely dangerous, and as Kirk Maitland, who had accompanied her, drew Lillian's hand through his arm and followed the hostess and Sumner, he said, quietly:

"My dear girl, you have done a very unfortunate thing for yourself. Of course, I know that our Lil could never by any chance be persuaded to give up her glorious freedom to marry anyone; but that young lady is in love with Sumner. She is not a person to allow anything to stand between her and revenge. She is to be his wife some day, and she will never forgive you to the day she dies for the words that both she and I heard Sumner speak to you. Besides that, Lil, I don't choose that you should have the attentions of that young fool!"

But Lillian had not heard the latter sentence.

"She is to be his wife?" she whispered, hoarsely.

"Yes," returned Maitland, serenely. "Did he mention marriage to you? Scoundrel! That is his way of accomplishing an end. It is always marriage that he talks, but it never comes to that. He'll get a breach of promise suit on his hands one of these days, or I'm mistaken. He and the pretty little Langford are to be married in December. She told me so less than ten minutes ago."

"His wife!"

The tone had changed from one of despair to one of

scorn, and Maitland glanced into the countenance and noted its expression with relief.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, mentally. "That was a capital stroke! Our beautiful dancing-girl is herself again. Her sentiment froze up as if an iceberg had suddenly struck it. She is as beautiful as that moon-beam, and—just as cold. God! if I could but melt that ice!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Have you seen him? Have you asked him?"

Amy was waiting for her sister down under the apple-tree, at the edge of the orchard, the single luxury allowed the family of Jonathan Esmonde. Her usually pale cheeks were crimson. Her eyes glistened like diamonds under her excitement. Her hands were clasped tightly upon her heaving bosom, and her voice, as she put her query, was hoarse with eagerness.

"Yes," answered Lillian, looking half tremulously at the little deformed thing. "I have seen him and I have asked him."

"He has consented. I see it in your face!" panted the child. "Oh, tell me quick!"

Lillian seated herself on the long grass under the tree, and pulled the little one down beside her.

"It was a long fight," she answered, wearily. "He absolutely refused at first, but I managed, somehow, to make him see how ungenerous he was, and he gave in at last."

Lillian expected an outburst of thanksgiving, but, to

her surprise, Amy dropped her pretty head, and a perfect passion of tears followed.

"Why, little one!" exclaimed the older girl, soothingly, "Tears? Why? Aren't you glad? I expected you to be all smiles, all delight?"

"It is a delight beyond smiles!" cried Amy, brokenly. "It touches deeper than that. It is the hope of my whole life. Oh, think! Think what it will be to—to be as you are. Think what it means to stand erect under God's sun. Think what it means to walk, to leap as others do, to be without this unceasing agony; to never see again that look of scorching pity upon the face of any one who gazes upon you, a pity that makes you hang your head in shame because the curse has been put upon you that places you between the level of the brute and man."

There was a storm of passion in the words and tone that startled Lillian. She put her arm about her sister and drew her to her.

"Ah, darling!" she murmured, "you must not hope too strongly. Suppose, after all, it should fail?"

"God would never be so cruel!" answered Amy, wildly. "What have I done that such a curse should be sent upon me?"

"But dear, dear, remember that others, hundreds, are like you—worse, perhaps. They bear the burden patiently, and—"

"But they have fathers to help them. It is not my life they lead. There is something for them beyond this eternal silence and emptiness. In these few weeks with you I have learned what life is, and I could never go back to the old routine. I never could. Don't destroy my hope, Lillian. It would be death. I know

you do it because you fear, because you are the best sister that God ever gave a girl, but—don't! don't! Oh, Lily, I love you so! I love you so!"

She hid her quivering face upon her sister's bosom and wept again, then she lifted it with the smiles breaking through like the sun from behind a cloud.

"I feel," she cried, "as if I could get up and dance the fantastic things you used to do, I am so happy. But oh, Lily, suppose I should be a burden upon you? Suppose there should not be enough for two, and—"

"Hush!" interrupted the elder girl, her face crimsoning with the old shame. "There will be enough, more than enough. You need not worry, and—"

She paused and glanced up. She had heard a foot-fall, and as she lifted her eyes, she saw Philip Sumner standing there before her.

There was sadness, reproach in his eyes, a heart-hunger that was piteous; but a band of ice seemed to encompass her as she looked into his face.

She put her sister aside, and rose stiffly.

Amy also struggled to her feet, and while she was doing it, cried out:

"Oh, Mr. Sumner, I am so glad you've come! You've always been so kind to me, and I am glad that you will be the first to know. She has done it—actually accomplished it, and I am to go to New York with her when she goes. Did you ever hear anything so glorious?"

He took both the little hands in his and pressed them warmly.

"I congratulate you with all my heart," he said, earnestly. "First upon the permission you have gained, and next upon having so good a sister. I

need not tell you of all the good results that I hope for."

"No; I was so sure you would be pleased."

"And you were quite right. May I ask what the plans are, Miss Esmonde? Is she to go into a hospital at once? I suppose it will be an hospital?"

"Yes," answered Lillian, striving with all her might to keep her voice steady and indifferent. "It shall be an hospital, and at once. Amy thinks there is not a moment to be lost, and I agree. At all events the doctors will have an obedient pupil, and one for whom hope and desire will accomplish much."

"And that is half the battle," said Sumner, nodding his head encouragingly. "I may be permitted to visit you, may I not, little one?"

"Oh, I hope you will. It is so good of you to think of it!"

She started to limp away, nodding over her shoulder smilingly, and Lillian asked, hastily:

"Where are you going?"

"To tell mother."

"I will go with you. You will excuse us, Mr. Sumner?"

"Not unless I must," he answered, looking at her curiously. "Won't you stay? I have something to say to you."

She hesitated a moment, then threw up her head with a haughty movement to which he was unaccustomed.

Sumner was a trifle discomfited. He stood for a little time awkwardly, then said, wistfully:

"How have I offended you, Miss Esmonde?"

She laughed lightly, just slightly frostily. If he

could have seen what it cost her, it might have saved much of the trouble of the after-time. But what man ever did see below the surface of a woman's laugh?

"You have not offended me, Mr. Sumner," she answered, carelessly.

It hurt him worse than an acknowledgment of the charge would have done—ininitely worse. But there were the words Kirk Maitland had spoken, stinging through her brain in voiceless clamor:

"She is to be his wife some day!"

"He is amusing himself with a little country girl," she continued, mentally. "He will marry her; but what matter if the little country school-teacher must suffer eternally because of his faithlessness? Well, he does not know Lil the dancing-girl. I will make him understand."

And then, with the resolve in her heart which he could not read, she smiled again.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked, humbly. "You are so cold, so frosty. Lily, I told you the other night of my love, and since then you have avoided me. Do you know what it was I thought? That you meant to punish me for my presumption."

"He does it well!" she ejaculated, mentally, her scorn almost uncontrollable; but she leaned just a trifle toward him as she replied, seductively:

"Presumption in man is like bravery; his character is nothing without it. But both are sometimes carried a little too far, and then we call it fool-hardy."

"Have I been fool-hardy, Lily?"

"You are like a child who pleads for that which is denied," she said, laughing. "Force accomplishes more oftentimes than pleading."

He looked at her curiously.

"I wish I could understand you," he said, with a little sigh. "You seem changed somehow. Little one, when we were interrupted the other night, it seemed to me that my soul was standing at the open door to Paradise. Has it closed to me since then?"

She controlled the curling scorn of her lip by a smile.

"You have not sought for admission since then," she answered, lightly.

"Ah! you are wrong. I was here yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, but you would not see me. You know that. It was that reason that made me believe that I had unconsciously given offense. Why was it, Lily?"

"Amy was ill," she answered, demurely.

"Was that the only reason?" he questioned, eagerly. "Oh, darling, if you knew how I have longed for the answer to my question! Won't you speak, my pure, white Lily?"

He put out his arms to draw her to him, but she stepped out of his way.

"What was the question?" she asked, with the laugh still lingering on her lips.

"If you love me," he answered, slowly.

If he had said, "Will you be my wife?" she might have informed him of what had been told her. She might have denounced him, and so received an explanation of the lie that had been told her; but she only replied, lightly:

"You must wait for your answer to that. I have known you too short a time. Do you remember how Jacob served for Rachel?"

"And is that my sentence, Lily?"

She nodded brightly as Kirk Maitland came into view.

He had heard the conversation, and a grim expression set his cruel, thin lips.

"She means to have her revenge," he muttered to himself; "but I don't care to risk it. Not that I mind her throwing him higher than a kite if it were sure to end there, but it isn't. It's a dangerous game, and she might find out the truth."

CHAPTER IX.

"Ah, Lil! Back again! My dear girl, how glad I am to see you! Do stand off there and let me look at you!"

The room in which Paul Chetwynd stood before Lillian was a large and airy one, with a smooth, inlaid floor and little furniture. What there was of it was good quality, though not pretentious, but beyond it, discernible through the light summer *portière*, was a dainty salon, all cream and gold, that a fairy might have envied.

She drew herself away from Chetwynd, who had taken her by the shoulders, and threw herself into a chair with a little laugh.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed, wearily lifting the damp hair from her brow. "How good it seems to be back. I think another week of it would have killed me!"

Chetwynd looked at her critically.

"And it hasn't done you an atom of good! I never

did believe in sacrificing one's self. It's a beastly bore, and does no good. You've lost ten pounds at least, and there are actually circles under your eyes, like the heroine of a dime novel. I say, you haven't been falling in love, have you, Lily?"

"For the love of mercy, drop that name, and don't make a donkey of yourself!" she exclaimed, fretfully. "It isn't like you, old fellow. I've been 'Lilyed' to death up there, and I'm utterly sick of it."

"Then you haven't fallen in love?"

The gesture of scorn was not quite in the old way, but Chetwynd only laughed.

"That isn't in my line!" she cried, with affected carelessness. "But who do you suppose turned up the next day after my arrival, and is there yet?"

"Felix?"

"Rubbish! Kirk Maitland. I nearly dropped dead!"

"Then I suppose every country bumpkin in the whole State knows the truth by this time."

"No; on the contrary, he acted surprisingly well, all things considered. You know I have not been any too sweet to Maitland, and I rather feared he would take a delight in betraying me, but he didn't. The fact is, I shall have to treat him better in future, and the prospect isn't pleasant."

"What a girl you are, Lil! I don't believe you have an atom of heart in your whole body."

"I wish to Heaven you were right!" she exclaimed, grimly. "I do, upon my soul! I am going to tell you something, Chet, that will surprise you. Do you know that I came very near giving up the whole business—shaking the whole thing and returning to that place that once seemed nothing short of perdition to me?"

I know you will think me mad, and perhaps I was, but it's the solemn truth, for all that. Poor little mother! What is to become of her in the awful solitude, is more than I can imagine! And then—I am sure that, in spite of all my father's faults, he really loves me. I know he does, poor old dad! You would be sorry for him if you could see how proud he is of his little school-teacher!"

"He would be prouder than that if he could see you dance."

"Never! He would despise me. He would separate me eternally from mother and Amy, and—and—I couldn't bear that, Chet. They are the only two in the whole world who really love me."

He looked at her curiously for a moment, noting the strained expression about the beautiful eyes, then said, softly:

"You always leave me out. Do I count for nothing?"

"Oh, bother! I am not talking about that! I am talking about love that is really love. Oh, you don't understand that sort of thing at all. You've always been good to me, Chet, but how long would you love me if I should fail to kick the object you hold over my head? How long would I remain the idol you call me if I should fail in a step which you have taken so much pains to teach me? It's another thing altogether, old fellow!"

She was not looking at him, but out of the window into the sultry street, looking dreamily, not realizing what she was saying, but rather talking as a parrot talks, without consideration.

She did not see the expression that had darkened

eyes, the eyes that had lighted with such pleasure at her entrance.

He had not seated himself, and once he took a step toward her impetuously, but in the next he had regained control of himself, and, with a gesture of dejection, leaned against the window-casing. He did not speak to her immediately, but when he did his voice was quite calm.

"It is no use to contradict you," he said, slowly. "You never believed in the sincerity of the affection of any one, and it is a waste of breath to try to convince you. But I'm heartily glad you didn't adhere to that first impulse and remain. It is no worse for the little other than it was before."

"Yes, it is. I've brought Amy with me."

"What! Are you crazy?"

"Not far from it, I think," she answered, laughing. "She has taken it into her head that she can be cured of her deformity, and I have taken her to the New York Hospital."

"Is there anything you would not do if they asked you?"

She hesitated a moment before replying.

"I don't think there is, Chet," she said, slowly. "You said a moment ago that I did not have an atom of heart, and yet—I really think that I long for love—and earnest, sincere, *saving* loving, as mortal never longed in all this world. I believe my mother and my sister would hate me if they knew and—"

The sentence ended with a dry, choking sob. If she had been looking at, or thinking of the man to whom she was talking, she must have seen how her words touched him—how they made him suffer. Once again

it seemed that it was impossible for him to check the flow of words that arose to his lips, but another searching look into her unanswering face silenced him.

"You don't know how it distresses me to hear you talk like that, Lil," he said, softly. "Why should they not love you because you dance? If you were any less pure than one of the ice floes from a northern pass, then they might find some fault. But who knows you so well as I? Not even yourself, I sometimes think."

"But you could never convince the world, Chet. I know you would if you could, old fellow, and I am a fool to whine at the fortune that has saved me from a long residence in Potter's Field, but to save my life I can't help it once in a while. You could never convince them that anything good could come out of Nazareth!"

She quoted the sentence bitterly—the one that she had spoken to Philip Sumner on the lawn of the Langford residence, and shivered as she recalled the time.

Chetwynd walked over behind her chair. His hands were in his pockets. Perhaps he had confined them there to keep from taking her in his arms to comfort her in the grief that he saw was tearing her, though he could not quite understand it. There was a vivid color in his cheeks as he leaned a trifle towards her.

"I wish to Heaven you had not gone there!" he said quietly but fervently.

"So do I, Chet. Upon my soul I do!" she cried, so earnestly that he started slightly. "It is worse than taking up the old burden anew, a thousand times worse!"

"And I have been cursed enough fool to ask a lot of the people here for to-morrow night in honor of your

coming home. I've ordered a dinner from Sherry and no end of a blow out, and you in this humor. I wish to Heaven I could content myself sometimes with attending to my own business, but it seems I never can."

Lillian laughed at his rueful tone. It was the first thing that had seemed to arouse her.

"I'm heartily glad you have!" she cried, looking towards him through a heavy moisture in the eyes which he saw clearly enough. "It is just what I need. Put me to work at once, Chet, with not a moment for thought, and when I must stop dancing, surround me with the gayest company you can find. I tell you frankly, I don't like the mood into which I have fallen. You say I have lost ten pounds. I don't mind telling you, Chet, that I have not slept two hours a night in over a week. It isn't like me, and—and—upon my soul, I'm afraid. Let them all come, Chet, and make them come often. When does the engagement begin, old man?"

"The twenty-sixth of August, and to-morrow will be the eighth. But there is so much to be done between now and then. I want you to make a great hit in this piece, Lil. I've made magnificent terms."

"Never mind the terms. They are always magnificent. Only I wish the work began to-day."

"You need rest, dear."

"Pouf! Don't I tell you how impossible that is?"

"Then let the real work begin to-day, the work of rehearsing. I've invented a new dance, and one I think you will like. If you can only do one thing, I am quite sure of a sensation."

"Oh, Chet, how good you are, old fellow. Why, I'm interested already, and I never expected to be again.

Make me work. Don't give me time to think, just yet. When there is no more work to do, spend all the magnificent salary of which you spoke to entertain our friends. You will help me, won't you, old man?"

The light in her eyes was almost glassy as she lifted them to those of her dancing-master—her friend. He sighed a trifle under the smile that he forced to his lips.

"You know I will, Lily," he answered, gently.

But she shrunk back from him as if he had met her request with a blow.

"For God's sake, don't call me that!" she exclaimed shudderingly. "I want to forget it. I tell you I must forget it. I am Lil! Lil the dancing-girl. The other life is ended forever, and with it goes the old name. There is no hope for me, Chet. I have chosen my life and I must follow it to the end!"

CHAPTER X.

If Lil had been beautiful on the night of the dance given by Miss Langford, she was magnificent, glorious, upon the evening of the dinner which Paul Chetwynd had ordered in her honor.

Her *spirituelle* beauty had never shone out so rarely so perfectly, as upon that occasion. She wore a gown of downy white chiffon embroidered in the most artistic of pale-pink rosebuds, with tremendous puffs on the shoulders of palest pink velvet. The very low corsage was finished with a fall of lace, and fastened from shoulder to shoulder with glittering diamonds.

that flashed their prismatic fires dazzlingly. Her beautiful hair was parted, falling away at the sides in little rippling curls, and fastened in the center above the forehead with a simple diamond star.

Chetwynd caught his breath as she came from her own *bijou boudoir* into the dancing-room, which they had converted temporarily into a salon. It was lighted with electricity under colored globes, and as she entered, Chetwynd, in regulation evening clothes, went toward her.

"What have you done to yourself, *chérie*?" he asked, as he took her hand. "Upon my soul, you dazzle me! You look like some spiritual creation colored by an artist's fancy. You are always beautiful, but to-night the word does not describe you."

A smile, that glittered under all its bitterness, lighted her features.

"Do you think my father would say that if he could see me now?" she asked, unable to keep the scorn out of her voice. "Do you think he would call me beautiful?"

Chetwynd hesitated.

"He knows nothing of the world," he answered at last slowly. "He would not understand what the world approves."

"You mean he would not understand that undress constitutes the full dress of society," she exclaimed in the same tone, "and that in our world we only observe the extremes of fashion. But his world is not mine, and mine is not his, and—there is the bell, thank God!"

Her expression changed as if by magic. There was no longer the look of bitter scorn in the lovely eyes,

but a brilliancy that startled Chetwynd. He watched her closely for a time, but as the guests began to arrive rapidly, his vigilance waned.

The last he saw of her she was standing beside a woman, whom, in derision, they called Mag, a contraction of Marguerite, which referred to the Marguerite Gautier, more familiarly known as "Camille." The woman was *chic* to a degree that attracted universal admiration, always clothed in spotless white—an actress affected with that fatal malady that destroyed Camille in the very presence of her happiness.

Her name, the one that appeared on the play-bill, was Nathalia Vinita. No one knew whether she was born so or not, and no one cared. To her intimates she was "Mag," to others Miss Vinita, and—that was all.

There were those who said she played Camille constantly in private life, but certainly any exercise that was unwonted brought the crimson stain to her handkerchief that characterized the person after whom she was called.

She was not beautiful, but worse—fascinating, and as she stood there beside Lil, they formed a picture that would have attracted attention in any salon.

"Ah you can't imagine how we have missed you, *chérie*," she was saying to Lil in her indolent, attractive drawl. "I should have taken to my heels and scampered over to Europe in sheer despair if I had not received the note from old Chet just as I did. Heavens! There has been nothing! Quiet is something that I should die under. Did you enjoy your outing?"

"Peuf!" exclaimed Lil, with an upward shrug of her

lovely shoulders. "Does one ever enjoy doing one's duty? There would be no credit in the performance if one should. Under those circumstances it would cease to be duty, and take on the form of pleasure, and then where would come in the pats of commendation upon one's back delivered by one's approving conscience. I think, Mag, that when God made us, He put two ignited fires into one. One is divinity—that is love. The other is sensitive conscience—that is hell."

Nathalia Vinita laughed softly, and waved her huge fan indolently.

"I recognize the one, but not the other," she replied, slowly. "A woman's life is fanned by love into a blaze of glory. She is nothing without it. She would collapse like lungs without the inflation of air. She would be less than the female beast, for there would be neither head nor heart, neither sense nor emotion. But as for the other—conscience! Pshaw! That is a folly of which I have never been guilty. You make yourself suffer while the real wrong-doer goes scot-free. I don't believe in hell. The pessimist who tells you that pain is the only positive principle in life, is the greatest liar of the age. It is happiness. That is the only feeling I ever allow myself, and she who does not follow the same lines is not a philosopher."

"I rather think you are right," answered Lil, musingly. "But I should like you to tell me what narcotic you use to lull it to sleep."

"Action!" exclaimed Miss Vinita with more energy than she had yet shown—"action! I never allow myself to think. I never see anything but the pleasant side of everything. I never by any chance consider the future. She who does that is lost to happiness. Each

individual day in my life takes care of itself. I see all I can of the people I like, and never bother myself with others. Consideration of one's neighbor may be charity, but it is much pleasanter to do one's charity work through institutions that live by contribution. I fill each day as full as the hours will hold. It has kept me alive when doctor's stuffs would have killed me long ago."

"I think your prescription is good. Perhaps I shall need a few lessons before I really learn to follow it with sufficient care. Will you give them to me?"

"With pleasure. There is Felix!"

A peculiar-looking man had entered the room—a man with a large head, made to appear larger by a great shock of half-curly hair thrown back from the forehead after the manner of musicians. He went at once to the side of his hostess, his eyes lighting with a peculiar fire.

"It has been slower than death without you," he whispered as he held her hand. "What a beastly bore life would be without our special goddesses! Chetwynd tells me you are going to dance for us tonight."

"He shouldn't have done it. I was reserving it for a surprise."

"He told me because he wanted me to bring certain music to play for you."

"You play for me to dance?"

He was the greatest musician of the age, and his condescension surprised her.

"Yes. It is an honor to play for such dancing as yours. Are you going to do it in that costume?"

She smiled.

"It might be suitable for minuet, but that is not in

my line. I have a startling one that arrived from Paris yesterday afternoon. I am going to try it this evening. Dinner? That is not unpleasant."

It was rather noisy, but delightful—one of those affairs in which Bohemia delights, where every one knows every one else, and has no fear whatever of misconstruction. As the wine flowed the fun became fast and furious. There was no one intoxicated, nor yet no one present who failed to feel its influence.

Lil had never been in such a mood in her life, and more than once Chetwynd's watchful eyes were cast in her direction with a dog-like devotion that few at that table failed to recognize, but to which Lil was utterly blind.

More guests arrived when the dinner was over, but the buffet in the dining-room supplied the inner man, and the clock was upon the stroke of twelve when Lil retired to her room, while Amilia de Marveaux was singing a chansonette which she was to do at the music hall the week following.

When the song had finished, Felix took his position at the piano.

He was about to begin his prelude—such a one as only Felix could perform—when the entrance of another guest attracted Chetwynd's attention.

"You, Ferrande!" he exclaimed, putting out his hand cordially. "I thought you sailed Wednesday. You got my note, then?"

"I think that had as much to do with my not going as anything else. Fact is, Dazian offered too tempting a salary to be declined, and I've postponed the tramp till next year. But I say, Chet, old man, I'm afraid I've taken a great liberty. An old college chum of

mine came in from the country today, and as everything is so dull, and he seemed rather out of sorts, I invited him here for an evening in Bohemia. Have I imposed upon your hospitality?"

"By no means. Bring him in."

And as Ferrande left the room, Felix began his prelude.

It began with a dreamy, improvised movement, that gradually changed to a quick time suitable for dancing, but such as an entire orchestra could scarcely equal, for what instrument can excel the piano in the hands of a master? It glided on and on, becoming with each moment more joyous, more rollicking, until at last the *portières* were thrown aside, and Lil—Lil the dancing-girl—stood before them.

Her corsage was even more *décolleté* than before, her beautiful limbs covered with flesh-colored tights, and about her an airy pink gauze light as down. It was draped in a fashion that Paris alone can master—artistic, fascinating.

She leaped into their midst like a young gazelle, just as light, just as graceful; and as she pirouetted upon the tips of her dainty toes at the beginning of her dance, she glanced laughingly in the direction of her teacher, Chetwynd.

But it was not into his eyes she looked.

For a moment the room seemed to grow black before her. She came down from her toes and groped blindly, then she flung up her head and laughed out wildly.

It was into the astonished, horrified eyes of Philip Sumner that she had gazed.

CHAPTER XI.

Lil had never danced in her life as she did that evening. It was the maddest, merriest whirl that could be imagined. It seemed that she would never tire; but each shout of approval from the enthusiastic spectators seemed to add more fuel to the fire in her soul.

She had never attempted before the feats that she seemed to perform with ease that night, and Chetwynd leaned wonderingly against the door-casing with his arms folded upon his breast.

"She is a marvel!" he said to himself a dozen times. "It must be the spirit of Beelzebub that has got into her. I never saw anything like it."

The public, that public that will attend a French ball one evening and draw its smile into Plymouth Rock primness on the next, might not have approved of all that she did, for indeed the spirit of Beelzebub did seem to possess her, as Chetwynd had said. The spectators laughed one moment in side-splitting amusement and watched with breathless intent the next; but one there was who could see nothing but horror in the performance, and looked on with the dismay he felt but too surely pictured in his countenance.

That one was Philip Sumner.

He neither moved nor spoke until the dance had come to an end, until the wild shouts of bravo had subsided, until the people who had surrounded Lil to shake her hand in congratulation had left her side, and then he went up to her.

She was still in tights, with that diaphanous drapery

floating about her. He half expected—hoped—that she would shrink from him, but she met his eye mockingly, indifferently.

“Halloo, old man!” she cried out, dauntlessly. “You look as if you’d seen a ghost! I hope it’s the one of that school-teacher you met up in the country. She is dead, you know, but her spirit does not deserve to rest in peace.”

If he could have seen how she was suffering, he might have taken her to his heart and have forgiven and saved her; but he did not. He only saw the smiling face, the limbs covered with tights, the total lack of shame, the depravity of her manner.

It was the most horrible shock that he had ever received in his life.

He had looked upon her as the purest, bravest, most loyal woman he had ever known, and now—An oppression of disgust tied his tongue. It seemed to him at that moment that he had never despised a human creature on all God’s earth as he despised her.

He remembered all the country folk had said of her, of the bravery and simplicity of her sweet life, and contrasted the story they had told with this scene—with that lovely, shameless face that was upturned to his.

He suffered enough in that moment to amend a thousand errors.

And then a great grief seemed to come over him. If Lil had not been half blind from the agony upon her, she might have seen that there were tears in his eyes.

“Don’t speak of that—of her—here!” he said in a low tone. “You are right. The little school-teacher

is dead, but I think her death has—has broken my heart!"

She looked at him mockingly.

"Hearts don't break!" she exclaimed, with affected lightness, smiling at him dazzlingly. "Why don't you tell me that you admired my dancing?"

"Because I did not. Oh, Lily, I wish you had died with the little school-teacher!"

"Pouf! There would have been twenty hearts broken instead of one. Besides, I am Lil here. It must be Lil or nothing. Remember that. Is Chetwynd a friend of yours?"

"Whom do you mean?"

"Chetwynd, my old teacher over there."

"No. I never met him until tonight. Ferrande—"

"Oh," she interrupted. "Ned! He is another of my old loves. Then you will come to our affairs often?"

"These things! For God's sake, do you *give* them often?"

"No. I give them for my own sake, or rather Chet does, which is quite the same thing. You will come often?"

"No. I hope to Heaven I shall never see your face again as long as I live!"

She laughed outright.

"But you will. I shall send you a special invitation to the next. You will come."

"I shall not."

"Is it to be a wager? All right, then. A box of cigars to a dozen of gloves. Don't distress yourself about the brand of cigars, because you won't win. Will you excuse me?"

She did not wait for his reply, but slipped away, while some one else was singing, and returned in a surprisingly short time in the costume she had worn earlier in the evening.

In spite of his intention to go at once, Philip Sumner was still there, talking now to Mag, to whom some one had presented him. He turned away from her as Lil entered and looked toward her. He remembered the night of the country dance and groaned.

Could this be the same girl with whom he had danced that evening? Was it possible that that demure little country girl, with her mull gown covering her throat, could be the same as this one, this with—
Ah!

The thought sickened him, and yet, in his own walk in life, in that society which his mother valued, ladies wore their gowns as low as this without thought of shame.

He felt a touch from Mag's fan, and turned to her again.

"Do you remember the story of the moth and the candle?" she asked in her sweet, indolent drawl.

"Yes," he answered absently.

"Is it to be enacted again?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't imagine that I take you for an unsophisticated young school-boy, but—don't fall in love with Lil."

"Why?"

"She has no more heart than that statue over there. Love is as necessary to her as the air she breathes; but there is one word that contains no meaning for her. It is reciprocation. She would allow you to

spend your fortune upon her this week, and pass you upon the street without recognition the next."

"The reputation is not one calculated to increase one's respect."

Mag shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"*Pourquoi?*" she inquired. "*She gives nothing in return.*"

Sumner colored. In spite of his recent discovery, it angered him to hear Lil spoken of in that broad, almost vulgar way, and he deserted the side of the woman who had volunteered the information without an apology.

It was indeed the moth and the candle, for he went at once to Lil.

She glanced up with a forced glitter in her eye and smiled, determined that she would accomplish the end she had in view.

"Come to the dining-room for a glass of champagne?" she exclaimed, familiarly putting her hand upon his arm. "I am dying of thirst."

It was he who shrunk away, but something there was in her manner that forced him to obey.

He looked down upon her almost fiercely as they stood beside the buffet.

"Why have you done this?" he asked, savagely. "Is it true that you have no heart?"

She made a little graceful gesture of annoyance.

"The dramatic is not at all in my line!" she exclaimed with an arch glance. "Come off, will you? Amuse me, and I will—love you," watching him closely from under her half-shut lids. "Distress or bore me, and I shall—cut you. Which do you prefer?"

"The latter, by all means. I wish to Heaven that I could hate you."

"But you can't. There is no one that ever tried it yet, consequently no one ever succeeded. You won't be the first, will you?"

She was laughing at him, and he knew it. Yet, for all that, he picked up the glass of champagne and drained it.

"Who is this Chetwynd?" he asked, suddenly.

"My teacher," she replied.

"Nothing else? Swear to me that he is nothing else."

She did not allow him to see how the question cut her. She put her pain willfully from her, and answered lightly:

"I swear it! But what possible difference can it make to you?"

"None—none whatever, I assure you. I am going now. It seems to me that it has been an evening in perdition. Before I go, there is one thing I want to tell you: I saw your father this morning."

For the first time she colored and her eyes fell.

"Well?" she whispered.

"He told me that Amy is to go to the New York Hospital. Is it true?"

"Yes," she whispered again, with her eyes still on the floor.

"I am going there to see her to-morrow."

She lifted her eyes. They rested pleadingly on his face.

"Don't tell her!" she exclaimed, hoarsely, pausing painfully between each word. "Don't; It is not for—"

my sake, but hers. It would—kill her! For the love of Heaven, promise!”

CHAPTER XII.

“Philip!”

Philip Sumner was standing at one end of the long room, looking moodily from the window. The ends of his mustache were between his teeth, his hands in the pockets of his trousers. There was a slight frown between his brows, and his face was ashen, colorless.

He started as the low tones of the sweet voice pronouncing his name reached him, and crossed the room at once to the side of the little lady in the opposite window.

She was a beautiful little creature, with silvery hair curling about a brow as fair as that of a young girl. There was a wild rose flush in the prettily rounded cheeks and a wistfulness in the blue eyes that were lifted to him that Philip never could resist. As he reached her side, the tiny, almost childish hand was put out gropingly, and then, for the first time, one realized that the small, snowy-haired, dainty creature was blind.

With a tenderness that was touching, Philip took the little hand between his own and raised it to his lips.

“I wish I could always be so near you when you call, sweet mother,” he said, gently. “What is it, dear?”

“I want you to sit down here closely beside me,

where I can feel your great strength for awhile. I am sadly in need of it to-day, Phil."

"Why? Do not you feel well, dear? Has anything gone wrong?"

She sighed a little, and turned her sightless eyes toward the window as he drew a chair up beside her and sat there holding her hand affectionately. She did not reply at once, and he sat there watching the expression of the changing face—watching it half unconsciously, until it suddenly dawned upon him that there was more of pain in it than usual, then he leaned forward and kissed her cheek lightly.

"Something is worrying you, little one," he said, gently. "What is it?"

His manner almost suggested that of a father to a distressed child, and a slight smile crept over her face as she turned it to him again.

"There are several things, Phil," she answered, her voice slightly tremulous. "I want to ask you something, dear, and am half fearful of giving offense; but—"

He interrupted her with a little laugh in which there was not a great deal of mirth.

"Did you ever offend me in your life?" he asked, with playful mockery.

"No; but there are certain things upon which a man will not bear questioning, even from his mother."

"Not from such a mother as mine—my other self!" he replied, tenderly. "What is it, dear little one?"

She put her hand gropingly, pathetically, until it touched his cheek, the wistfulness of her expression deepening.

"You have not seemed—just like yourself, my boy,

since your return from the country," she said, slowly. "Phil, dear, did anything happen between you and Olive Langford that—distressed you?"

"Why, no!" he answered, half laughing. "What made you think that?"

"You have been so silent, so unlike yourself. You are not happy, Phil. You can not deceive your mother. The blind have a sixth sense—the ability to read silence—I think. What is the matter with my boy?"

"You are worrying yourself foolishly, little one," he answered, with an assumption of lightness. "I was never better in my life."

"Physically, perhaps, but not mentally. Did you—have you—asked Olive to—to be your wife, dear?"

"No, mother."

"When are you going to do it, Phil?"

There was something so strange and strained in her voice that the young man looked at her curiously before replying.

"Never!" he answered, slowly.

She started slightly. He observed that she grew a shade paler and an anxious expression dawned in the blind eyes.

"Why?" she asked, hoarsely. "You love Olive, Phil?"

"As I might a sister, but not as my wife," he replied, quietly.

She drew her hand from him, not suddenly, but slowly.

"Phil," she whispered, "I—I thought you—loved her?"

He laughed again.

"Why, no, mother. Olive is a nice girl, a dear girl,

but a man does not want to marry every nice girl. I like her, but as for love—oh, gracious, no! There is not a semblance of that sort of thing in our friendship."

Her face had grown whiter and whiter, until every particle of the lovely wild-rose color had disappeared.

He observed how closely the small hands were clasped, and some sort of anxiety dawned in the young man's breast, apart from his own suffering.

"What is the matter, little mother?" he asked, gently. "Was it your wish to see Olive my wife?"

"Yes," she answered, hesitatingly, hoarsely. "I wished it—above all things, Phil."

"But you will not when I tell you that there is no love in my heart to give her," he said, quietly.

"Is there—is there—any one else, Phil?"

He did not see the quivering of her lips, the strained expression of the face. The question upset him too much for that. He rose suddenly and walked across the room; then, instead of returning to her, he leaned against the mantel-shelf and looked down at her, avoiding the range of the blind eyes.

"No, mother," he answered in a choked sort of way.

She started a little and bent her head forward as if she were listening, then lifted it half eagerly.

"I am glad of that!" she exclaimed, as if she were breathing more freely.

"Why?"

"Because it—it makes it easier, dear."

There was a little pause, during which she clasped and unclasped her fingers nervously; then Philip went back to his old seat and took her hands again.

"What is it, dear?" he asked, gently. "Something

is distressing you. Won't you tell me what it is?"

"Yes, Phil, because I *must* tell you; but if there were any way to avoid it, I would—I would give my life to do it!"

She had moistened her dry lips several times during the speech, had hesitated over the utterance of the words painfully, and when she ceased speaking he observed that there were tears in her eyes.

"Go on, little mother," he said, encouragingly.

She waited a moment before replying, then cried out:

"Oh, Phil, I thought you loved her!"

"And now that you know I do not, does it fret you so? Had you so set your heart upon my marrying Olive, mother?"

"It isn't that, dear—it isn't that!" she cried, her voice quivering with emotion, as she caught his hands more closely and drew him to her. "It is that—you—must marry her, Phil!"

"Must!"

He rose to his feet suddenly, a crimson flush surging into his face.

"What is it that you mean, mother? Pshaw! I believe you half frightened me for a moment."

"Listen, Phil!" she exclaimed in that low, vibrating voice that always commands attention. "I would save you this knowledge if I could. I know you so well, dear, that I am perfectly sure that you would never yield to my entreaty to make Olive your wife, when your heart has not preceded the asking. You would not yield a point of conscience. But there are reasons why—it—it is necessary, Phil."

"I don't see what reasons could make such a thing

necessary. I am no longer a boy, mother. I see that something is distressing you beyond measure. You must tell me clearly, fully, what it is."

"It is this, Phil—your father's honor!" she cried, leaning toward him dramatically. "My son, a few months ago there was a threatened failure at the bank. If it had occurred, your father would have been blamed by the courts and by all the world."

"My father!"

"Wait! It would have—sent him to—State's prison! He believed at the time, Phil, that he was doing right. He did not intend to—to—embezzle, or whatever the dreadful word is that they use for it. But you know, Phil, that the world nor the courts ever look to the intention. You know that your father was not—a thief, and I know it; but that would never convince the world."

She was leaning toward him with her sightless eyes upon him, strained, haggard, as if she were striving to make him believe something which she herself doubted, as if she were forcing belief, and Philip saw. He staggered to his feet again in deathly silence, stared at her for a time, then when he could command his voice, whispered hoarsely:

"Well!"

She moistened her stiff lips again and went on, leaning toward him in an uncanny sort of way and speaking in a tone that seemed to freeze his blood.

"Arnold Langford—knew the truth. He held the proofs. He—He holds them—today. He consented to help your father—to save him under one condition—that you marry Olive. I—I thought you loved her, Phil. I thought there would be no hardship in it for

you, my boy, and by—by my advice your father—consented to the arrangement. Well, Phil, Arnold Langford is becoming impatient. He demands that the promise be made good. He wishes the marriage to take place at once. It is the price of your father's honor, Phil!"

She was leaning toward him breathlessly, and his hoarse reply brought a wildness to her eyes that smote him to the soul.

"There is no honor that has a—price!"

She stood up—a little thing not larger than a child, but the anguish in her eyes was awful.

"Then his—*liberty!*" she whispered, hoarsely. "Phil, for the love of a merciful Heaven, you would not open to your own father the door of Sing Sing, would you?"

CHAPTER XIII.

Philip Sumner shuddered.

Even in the horror that was upon him, it suddenly occurred to him what a strange thing it was that he, Philip Sumner, should stand there and listen while his father was called a thief!

He put it in plain English there in his own mind, for he knew that was no other word that would express the awful truth. His father a thief! And he, proud man that he was, proud man that he had always been, must needs stand there and listen in silence, for he knew they were spoken by one who would sooner have cut out her tongue than have uttered them. She

was palliating the offense, striving to shield the man she loved with all the strength of her true, loyal soul, but Philip understood, and—she knew he did.

If she herself had committed the offense, she could not have looked more the guilty, shrinking thing than she did, standing there with bowed head and white, trembling lips; and after a moment of stunned silence, Philip went up to her and took her almost fiercely in his strong arms.

“Are you sure that this is all true?” he asked, heavily. “Are you sure that there is no mistake?”

“There is none, Phil. I had corroboration from his own lips.”

“And you love him as you did before?”

“I love him as women should only love their God!” she answered in a voice that was choked with anguish. “I sometimes think it is the punishment He has sent for a usurped worship. Oh, Phil, it is your mother’s life as well as your father’s liberty that I am asking! My son—my son—”

“Hush!” he whispered, silencing her lips with his own. “You must give me time to think of all this. It is so—new—so unexpected, that it has—stunned me. You must give me a little time, but—my mother knows that she can—trust *me*!”

There was an emphasis upon the last word that cut her to the soul. She shrunk back as if from a blow, but he was too much bewildered to see. He kissed her gently while he whispered:

“I am going now where I can be alone for a little while. Don’t let me be disturbed. Don’t fret, little mother. Your son’s shoulders are broad enough to bear your burden!”

He took his arm from about her and left her, mounting the stairs slowly and seeking his own room. When he had gained it, he locked the door, then stood still, striving to think of the situation.

It seemed to him that he was mentally dumb for a time, incapable of thought, and then a word went through his brain as if fired from a cannon.

"Thief!"

His father a thief!

The very idea seemed ridiculous, and then:

"She—she said it," he murmured aloud, wearily, "she who would give her very soul to save him from harm. He has told her all, he—the coward! The infamous coward! Why was it necessary that he should burden her poor life with that? Why could he not have come to me? Because he knew that I should have demanded to know the truth. Because, while he had the nerve to become a thief, he was too great a coward to hear it from the lips of his son. God! I, the son of a thief! I—"

He interrupted himself with a hoarse, bitter laugh, a laugh that startled even himself, and he pulled himself up shortly, and crossing to the window, threw himself into a chair before it. There was a mocking smile still lingering upon his lips as he continued his self-communion.

"I despised—her because she danced for a living, and now—my father—a thief! Verily, the punishment for my pride has not been retarded. God! What a world it is! I have been a Don Quixote all my life, fighting wind-mills. I have tried to see truth and purity in all I have met, but how can purity spring from putrefaction? If I were like the rest of the

world, I might go on and be happy in the same way. They would call me fool, in that I object to eating bread bought with stolen money. They would call me fool, in that I hesitate to save myself and my fortune by making a beautiful woman my wife. They would call me fool, in that I resolved to avoid temptation in remaining away from the girl with whom I have fallen so madly in love, because she happens to be a *première danseuse*. Well, and are they all wrong and I the only one who can be right? The world would tell me, save your fortune, by all means. Marry this girl of wealth and beauty, and then—if the *première danseuse* still attracts you, is there any reason why you should avoid her society any more than the rest of mankind? Pouf! Are you to constitute yourself the savior of the world? You, the son of a thief?

“After all, what better is Arnold Langford than Halford Sumner? Arnold Langford conceals the theft and sells his daughter to the thief’s son. What reason has he for that? Great God! I must be mad indeed when I ask the reasons for the facts of a thief’s accomplice. Well, what answer is there that I can make to my mother? Only this: I, the son of a thief, will marry the daughter of his accomplice, and so save the world the knowledge of the knavery of this precious pair. There is nothing else that can be asked of me, I suppose? I can not be compelled to love her! Ha! ha! I wonder if she knows the terms of this compact? Well, it has not taken me long to determine upon my future course. What a change a few hours can make in a man’s life! This morning when I received a note from Lillian Esmonde—Lil the dancing girl—I determined that I would not accept

her invitation to a *tete-a-tete* dinner, an invitation issued through sheer bravado, but now—now—”

He threw up his head and laughed again, a laugh that was horrible. Then he rang his bell violently.

“Ferdenande,” he said hastily to his valet, “ring for a messenger. I want to send a note at once. Then get my evening clothes.”

He went to his *escritoire* as he spoke, and hastily penned the lines:

“MY DEAR MISS ESMONDE,—Pardon a delayed answer to your charming invitation. I will explain the reason for it when I see you at the hour you named—seven.

Ever sincerely,

PHILIP SUMNER.”

He dispatched the note, then, with the assistance of his valet, got into his evening clothes. If Ferdenande observed the singular expression upon the handsome features, he made no comment; but the grimly set mouth did not exactly correspond with Philip's care of his toilet, concerning which he had never been so particular.

When it was completed, he descended the stairs and again entered the presence of his mother.

She was still sitting beside the window, white-lipped, anguished; but his own pain, for the first time in his life, blinded him to hers. For he was suffering as only men of his nature can suffer.

She lifted her head eagerly as he came into the room, then rose unsteadily and put out her hands without speaking. He went up to her and again took her in his arms.

“Well, Phil?” she exclaimed, breathlessly, not able

to force her voice above a whisper. "What — is it?"

"I am ready to make the sacrifice for your sake, little mother," he answered, endeavoring to speak lightly, but only succeeding in making his voice sound reckless. "Don't let it worry you any more. I was a fool to have hesitated at all, but it was only for a moment. After all, Olive is a beautiful woman, and has been brought up in that society which has taught her not to exact too much of a husband. Kiss me, little one."

She lifted her mouth obediently, but the quiver of the lips hurt him.

"Don't grieve, dearest," he said, tenderly, drawing her to him caressingly. "After all, I dare say we shall be as happy together as the general run of married people, Olive and I. It is only that it has rather knocked me out, from being a sudden blow from a most unexpected quarter. I am going out to dinner now. To-morrow I shall be all right."

"I am glad you are going out, Phil."

He wondered if she would be glad if she knew where he was going; but he only smoothed her hair tenderly for a moment, then left her.

It was five minutes before the appointed hour that he pushed the button of the front door leading to Lil's flat. He went up in the elevator and rang again. Lil's trim little maid answered the summons and showed him at once into her mistress's reception-room.

Lil was standing there in the center of the floor, gowned in a pale-blue chiffon. It was *décolleté*, exposing her beautiful throat, bare of jewels. There was a smile upon her lips more dazzling than diamonds. She

put out her hand, and as Philip Sumner took it he lifted it to his lips.

"Miss Vinita compared my case to that of the moth and the candle," he said, with his admiring eyes upon hers. "I tried to prove even to myself that it was not true, but the attraction was too strong. I tried to remain away, and so left your note unanswered; but I could not. You see I am here. You know your power fully, and I have given myself up to it, heart and soul."

CHAPTER XIV.

Lil looked at Philip Sumner in a little surprise. She observed the expression of excitement in his eyes, the flush upon his cheeks, the recklessness of his manner, but did not translate it aright. She smiled up at him as she withdrew her hand, exclaiming, archly:

"Then you have entirely recovered from your shock. You do not despise me because of the lie I lived for a month at home? You do not hate me as you said?"

He shrugged his shoulders curiously, and a bitter half-sneering smile curved his lips.

"Why should I?" he asked, quietly. "Are you different from the rest of the world? I made a confession to myself this afternoon. It was this: 'You have been a Don Quixote all your life, fighting wind-mills. You have been a fool as mad as he!' And so I have dropped the wind-mill racket, Lil, and have joined the ranks of pleasure-seekers. The greatest pleasure that life promises is in your society, and so I seek it."

She looked at him earnestly. There was something

in his tone and manner that distressed her, but she could not exactly analyze it.

She threw herself into a chair, and looked up at him with the dazzling smile upon her lips and in her eyes intensified. And then the servant announced dinner.

They were alone. The dining-room was not brilliantly lighted, but only from the candles that shone softly under colored shades. The servant was not present save as summoned, and the table was not large. There was a vase of lotus blooms in the center of the table that gave out a seductive perfume that seemed to tie itself bewilderingly into the brain and bubble through the blood like an intoxicant. The very dimness of the light was seductive.

"I can imagine nothing more heavenly than to sit like this through life," he said, recklessly, leaning toward her as if to drink in the strange beauty of her face. "I wonder if you are as much a philosopher as I have become? For the rich man life was made for pleasure, and he who tries to do anything but enjoy himself is a fool. Do you not think so, Lil?"

She did not reply directly to his question, but answered with another.

"Why do you call me Lil? I thought you hated it."

"It is inseparable from your new life. It does not fit the character. My lily was a sedate little flower with a quiet dignity that was as lovely as its own pure whiteness. My Lil is more like that lotus bloom—seductive, bewildering, intoxicating. I loved the lily; I am entranced by the lotus bloom. The effect is a delicious harmony of thought and feeling which produces a sensation for which even death has no terror.

Ah, Lil, I loved the dainty, debonair little school-teacher, but I worship the blasing, glittering, dazzling dancing-girl as the sun-worshippers were wont to adore their god."

He laid his arm upon the table, palm upward, invitingly, entreatingly. She hesitated a moment. She scarcely knew what to do. Could it be possible that Kirk Maitland had lied to her?

She was more than half convinced that he had.

She put out her dainty cool palm and allowed it to fall upon his, soft as a snow-flake. She almost started as the heat of his hand met hers. It was like a fiery furnace, scorching with red heat. But his fingers closed over hers before they could be withdrawn.

"God!" he exclaimed, huskily, drawing his chair nearer to her, "do you think I will ever let you escape, now that I hold you? Lil! Lil! give yourself to me, darling! Let me love you as I can. Do you remember the night of the country dance? It seemed impossible then that I could ever aspire to such perfection as you, yet I have grown bold with desire—mad, perhaps. Lil, love me!"

She did not reply. It seemed, somehow, that the heat of his passion had rather dazzled her. She stared at him for a moment in absolute silence, scarcely daring to listen to the voice of her own heart—and then, she scarcely knew how it happened—but she found herself in his arms, with her lips answering his wild kisses.

"Darling!" he whispered, "darling, let me hear it once! Tell me that you love me! Lil, my own, speak to me!"

And then, for the first time in all her life, her lips

spoke those words that had never left them save in mockery:

"I love you, Philip!"

His arms closed about her more passionately. He had thought to be happy when he had heard them spoken, and yet they seemed to ignite in his soul the fires of hell. He dared not let her see his face, and so concealed it in her bosom. It was the first dishonorable act of his whole life, and it stung him through with the flame from perdition.

But it did not last long. He calmed his conscience with a reckless laugh and flung up his head. The crimson flame was showing through his cheeks, and lighted his eyes with a glow that blazed.

"I am the happiest man in the world!" he exclaimed, in uncontrollable excitement. "To our love, Lil—to our beautiful love!"

He lifted his champagne-glass above his head and looked at her, with the reeling, intoxicated expression growing with each moment. She lifted hers, and they clinked glasses merrily. His mood had seemed to impart itself to her. She had ceased to think of Kirk Maitland and the words that he had spoken. She loved Philip Sumner. She was taking the joy from the passing hour without thought of the future. But she trusted him.

They paused in their rapturous conversation only while the servant was in the room to change a course, and it was with a sense of relief that both arose from the table at last.

As they entered the reception-room, Lil flung herself into a great chair, lifting her beautiful dimpled arms above her head. When they fell they were about

his neck as he knelt beside her. She drew his head closely to her and kissed him upon the eyes.

"Ah, love," he murmured, "what a life it will be! Where will be the need of heaven? Champagne, and powers, and love! What combination could a poet suggest that could fill a life more full of royal living than that?"

"And you will always love me, Philip?"

There was something so wistful in the tone that it touched him.

"First and best always, my darling!" he answered, more earnestly than he had yet spoken. "First and best always. You must never doubt that, Lil, whatever comes."

She smiled up at him happily. The step of the servant in the hall was heard and he arose. Not, however, before the girl had seen their positions, and a slow smile curved the domestic's lips. She set her tray upon the table, a tray containing champagne and glasses, and left the room.

Lil rose, but before she could reach the table, Philip Sumner's arms were about her. She yielded to him joyously, and neither heard another step in the hall, the quiet, firm step of the dancing-master. He was coming in with some piece of news which he thought would interest Lil, and had even lifted a corner of the *portière*, when the tableau met his eye,

He did not speak, but dropped the *portière* and went away quietly. The anguish in his heart was awful.

"It is goodbye to hope," he murmured. "My Lily is too pure for this to mean anything but an honorable marriage, a marriage that will separate us eternally. God knows I would not stand between her and happi-

ness. I never expected that she could love me, but I hoped—I hoped—”

What he had hoped seemed to be vague enough, for he never completed his sentence. He only sat down upon the side of a chair, and, covering his face, groaned.

Meanwhile, Lil and Philip were still unconscious of the whole world about them. They were living in the first hours of love, the one with a fever of remorse burning his soul, the other with a sentiment as pure and holy as that which marks the affection of a child for its mother. For while Lil had determined at one time that she would make Philip Sumner suffer for what she thought to be a flirtation at her expense, she believed now as truly in the sanctity of his love as she did in that of her Creator. And she was yielding herself as completely to the joy of her love as the enthusiast does to the first inspiration of religion.

And then, while the thirst of heart and soul was being assuaged with kisses, the bell rang. Neither of them heard it, but a discreet cough from the domestic who had entered before warned them.

She lifted the *portière* and announced:

“Mr. Maitland!”

And Lil was too happy to feel annoyed. She suddenly recalled the words that he had spoken concerning Olive Langford, and a smile of supreme content crossed her mouth at the remembrance.

“When did you come down from the country?” asked Lil, when she had shaken hands with him.

“Only to-day. Did you not know that you would be the first upon whom I should call?”

He looked at her reproachfully, and in some annoyance. Philip exclaimed:

"Then you knew Miss Esmonde before?"

"Why, certainly. Lil and I are old friends, but I certainly did not expect to see you here, old man! She and I had many a laugh over how completely you were duped up there in the country. By the way, Miss Langford came down this morning. She is to remain a week, I believe. Of course you will see her?"

CHAPTER XV.

It is doubtful if there was ever a more miserable man than Philip Sumner was when he left the residence of the dancing-girl that evening, and yet with that reckless defiance of fate and conscience that was so newly born within him, he endeavored to still the voice of disgust and self-contempt.

He did not return home, but went to the club, and for the first time in his life some of his friends and associates saw him under the influence of drink. He played poker rather wildly, that also being a new experience, and with the luck of a new player, rose from the table with an unsteady smile upon his lips, and a thousand dollars in his hands that had not been there when he entered the room.

"You should invest it in a souvenir!" exclaimed one of the gamblers, laughing, as he looked into the flushed and rather swollen face.

"I will!" he cried, a little wildly. "It shall purchase a diamond star for—my sweetheart."

"A star in her own right?" laughed the first speaker. "I heard last night that you were rather hard hit with one of the Thespian firmament. Seductive little witch! But I say, Sumner, take care! She is fooling thee. That dainty, airy little creature is more like an eel than anything you ever saw. You've got her one minute, or, rather, think you have, and the next she has slipped through your fingers, and clean escaped you. I shall look out for the souvenir the next time I dine with her *tete-a-tete*."

A dark cloud gathered on Sumner's brow. One moment it seemed to him that he must throttle the smiling scoundrel that sat there gazing up at him so nonchalantly, and then he turned away with an upward shrug of the shoulders, not able to find voice for a reply.

He hated himself because he loved her, this woman whose name was handled so lightly by every *rouè* in town, this woman who indulged in *tete-a-tete* dinners with every Tom, Dick and Harry that happened to come along. He had felt himself a scoundrel early in the evening that he had made love to a woman whom he had no intention of asking to be his wife, yet now an expression of sneering scorn disturbed his features in that his supersensitive conscience had smote him.

Perhaps it was the wine he had drunk that caused it, but whatever may have been the reason, he fell into a deep slumber when he had retired early in the morning, and did not awaken until his valet had aroused him. His head ached. There was a sense of sullen oppression upon him. He lay there for some time staring up at the ceiling, and recalling the events of

the evening before. It was certainly not calculated to lighten the burden in his brain.

He remembered vividly the speech of his fellow clubman concerning Lil, and it sent a stinging shame into his cheeks. Then he recalled the words of his mother in this wise:

"Arnold Langford is growing impatient for the consummation of the promise made him."

A low, sneering laugh left the rather pale lips, and Phil sprung from his bed. The cold plunge did him good, but his breakfast was still untasted when he left the house and went down-town to his office. There seemed nothing to be done there, and he sat thinking for some time, the old recklessness growing upon him again.

At three o'clock he left the office, drove to a florist's and sent Lil a magnificent box of flowers, with a line upon one of his visiting-cards:

"A setting for the jewel of love."

Then he re-entered the coupé again, after giving the coachman Olive Langford's address.

A grim smile was upon his face as he took his seat.

"Verily," he said between his set teeth, "it is a fitting beginning for the life that I have planned in my efforts to be as great a scoundrel as my fellows. I go from a message to my sweetheart to the home of my future wife."

He drowned the sting of conscience in five little words that had burned themselves into his brain:

"The son of a thief!"

Olive entered the room where he waited, ten minutes after his card had been sent her.

"I thought you would come!" she exclaimed, cordi-

ally, extending her hand to him. "Have you seen Kirk Maitland?"

"Yes," he answered, coloring as he remembered where. "He told me you were here, and I came the first moment afterward that decency would allow. Why did not you send me a note?"

"He said he would tell you. It is father's birthday next week, and I came down to purchase some presents."

The reference to her father caused Philip to wince, but he continued to smile.

"Then your visit is not for long?"

"No; only a few days."

"I hope you will get time to run in to see mother before your return. She is very fond of you."

"I shall certainly take the time. I, too, am fond of her, and feel flattered that she likes me."

"It is more than that, Olive. The little mother had a daughter of her own once, a poor afflicted thing, but perhaps loved all the better because of that. The idol died, and since then the mother-heart has longed for another daughter. She hopes you will be that one, Olive."

Miss Langford looked at him in genuine surprise. She had hoped for many months to hear a declaration from his lips, but certainly now was not the time that she had expected it. And then, there was no passion in his utterance, no preamble of love, only this plain matter-of-fact statement almost immediately following his entrance into the room.

The lack of affectation in her surprise interested Philip.

"I am afraid I have taken an undue advantage of

ou," he went on, quite calmly, "in, so to speak, springing this upon you in this unexpected way; but you know that in spite of his prerogative, it is an embarrassing thing for a man to ask a woman to be his wife. It looks so infernally conceited for a fellow to think that a beautiful girl like you could think enough of him for that. I shall know that it is quite what I deserve if you refuse unconditionally, but—I wish you would not. Will you be my wife, Olive?"

She did not reply. Every particle of color had vanished from her cheeks. She sat down in a chair and looked up at him vaguely, as if his words were little less than an enigma to her. And he stood there looking down at her and chewing the ends of his mustache savagely, the troubled look deepening in his eyes. He had tried with all his might to infuse his voice with something like affection, but to save his soul he could not succeed in making it anything but deathly cold.

He forced himself to go up to her after an embarrassed silence, and lean over the back of her chair.

"Won't you at least speak to me, Olive?" he asked.

She seemed for a little time to be fighting down her emotion, then she cried out passionately:

"What is it that you are offering me—your love or simply your name?"

He straightened himself and stared over her head for a moment out of the window. To save his life he could not be sufficiently false to himself and his manhood to tell her the lie that he knew very well was demanded of him, and after a time he spoke hoarsely:

"I must tell you the truth. I can not lie to the woman whom I am asking to share all my future life. It is not the love which I hope will come with time,

not the love which I wish to God it were now. If you refuse, because of my brutal frankness, I shall deserve it, and shall have no censure for you, but I beg that you will not. I entreat that you will accept what I have to give now, being sure that I shall try to deserve the trust you place in me."

It is just possible that she hated him then, as it had never seemed possible to her that she could hate him. The expression of her gray eyes was not good to see. There was something absolutely greenish and cat-like in them, but Philip was not looking at her. It seemed to him that he could not do so with his conscience so in revolt against compulsion.

Neither of them knew how long that stony silence was continued, but Olive Langford arose at last stiffly.

"I am going to surprise you," she said, heavily, "by accepting the offer that you have made me. I confess that from your attentions in the past, it is not what I expected, but— Well, let that go. Perhaps it is pure selfishness that causes me to do it. It is not necessary to analyze emotions at present. I will be your wife, Philip."

He started toward her in a perfunctory sort of way, as if to put his arms about her and kiss her, but she stepped back and flung out her hand passionately.

"No, not that—not that!" she cried. "Neither now nor at any future time until you tell me that the love your wife has a right to demand is mine. You will understand that and respect it?"

"I will understand it and respect it."

"Thank you. Will you leave me now?"

"When may I come again?"

"This evening, if you wish. It may be pleasanter if

you bring your mother with you, provided of course she is not engaged elsewhere."

"I will bring her."

He left the room humbled, admiring her more than he had ever done before in his life; but perhaps he would not have done so could he have seen the expression of her countenance when the door had closed upon him.

Her fingers were clinched in the palm of her hand, and her eyes blazed with fury.

"It is that little school-teacher that has done this, curse her!" she exclaimed, hoarsely. "I understand it all. He could not make her his wife. He offers me that exalted position, while he gives his love to her. Well, we shall see. I will discover the secret of all this, and then—and then—they both shall suffer. Trust Olive Langford for that!"

CHAPTER XVI.

Lil was dressed again for one of those evenings at home for which she had become famous among women of her own set and clubmen who frequent the homes of actresses. When she was playing, or, rather, dancing in the theater, she held them from twelve o'clock until the people got ready to go home, at least three times a week, and when she was not engaged in the early part of the evening, her house was always open. It cost her no end of money, but then, Lil was the rage, and she made no end of money.

After five o'clock in the afternoon, the dancing-

room, or practice-room, was always converted into large *salon*, in which the guests were entertained, and the other rooms were too small to accommodate those who came to share her hospitality.

There was an added brightness in her eyes and a flush upon her cheeks that had not been there of late when she entered the room where Chetwynd awaited her. She wore a blue *crêpe* embroidered in silver—one of the most elaborate gowns in her possession—and upon the left breast, just above the heart was fastened a great diamond dagger surmounted by a magnificent pearl. It was the only jewels she wore, and as she entered the room and it met Chetwynd's eye, a sort of groan was strangled upon his white lips.

"Where did you get it, Lil?" he asked, motioning to the dagger, but not touching it, though she stood directly before him.

She smiled up at him saucily.

"Guess!" she exclaimed.

"It is of fabulous value," he said, evasively. "That pearl in the end alone is worth what would be a fortune to some people. I should say the dagger must have cost the donor full five thousand dollars."

"I rather think you are right," she replied, looking down upon it admiringly from the corner of her beautiful eyes. "It is a new mash, Chet."

"I'm afraid it is a serious one this time, little girl."

Even then she did not see the drawn, haggard look in the eyes, nor note the whiteness of the face. All women who are in love are unconsciously selfish.

She looked up at him, the smile vanishing, and a little wistful expression drawing her lovely mouth.

"I am very happy, old friend," she said, slowly, her

voice and expression not quite fitting her words. "I find that there is one man in the world great enough of soul to forget the position I occupy and think only of what I am in reality. I thought myself the most miserable of women when I came home from the country; but instead of that, I did not realize the happiness that was in store for me. I guess that was because I have never quite learned to trust any man but you. I know now, however, that there is another good one, and that I have won his love. Won't you congratulate me?"

"With all my heart. But will you be offended, little one, if I put a question?"

"Offended with you? Never!"

"It may sound insulting, but you know old Chet could never mean that to you."

She put her hand upon his shoulder and touched his cheek with her lips. It stung a drop of color into them, but he did not shrink from the touch that must have seered like a red hot iron.

He put his hands upon her shoulders and held her back from him, looking earnestly into her eyes.

"It is *marriage*, little one, is it not?"

She was about to reply, but before the words could leave her lips, the *portière* was thrown aside and Nathalia Vinita was announced.

She came forward with her usual indolent step, and put out her hand to Lil.

"What a lucky girl you are, my dear!" she said, drawlingly. "You are never without some one to make love to you. When all else fails, there is Chetwynd."

"You are very much mistaken if you think Chet ever

makes love to me," laughed Lillian. "I don't believe he would know how. I'll bet he never made love to a woman in his life; did you, Chet?"

He concealed his pain, and answered, lightly:

"No."

"There! I knew it! He knows no more about love than that fellow Plato did when he wrote his absurd theories."

"I have my doubts as to your paramount knowledge on the subject, also," said Miss Vinita, softly, lazily waving her ubiquitous fan. "For my own part, I think Plato far and away more sensible than Ovid; and I believe that, as far as you are concerned, you know about as little of one as the other. You are a glittering piece of frosty ice, pretty Lil!"

"I shall convince you, inside of thirty days, that you don't know what you are talking about!" cried Lil, gayly.

"How?"

"I refuse to answer; but I'll make any bet with you that you like that it is true."

Miss Vinita looked interested.

"Are you engaged?" she inquired dubiously.

"I decline to answer that also; but if you'll make the bet, I'll give you your own odds."

A number of others entered the room at that moment and shook hands.

"What's the matter, Mag?" queried one of them. "You look so—queer?"

"Well, I feel queer," she answered in her accustomed drawl. "It's a sort of puzzle that I can't make out. I have been given the end of a tangled skein and told to unwind it while my eyes are closed."

Lil was laughing heartily. She paused to welcome Kirk Maitland, looking into his eyes a trifle defiantly, while she spoke some words daintily.

"Tell us of it!" exclaimed some one to Miss Vinita. "You have aroused our curiosity."

"Have I your permission, Lil?"

"*Pourquoi pas?*" asked their hostess, with a little upward shrug of the shoulders.

"I think Lil was trying to make me believe that she has fallen in love," said Miss Vinita, slowly, as if she were carefully measuring her words.

A burst of laughter from the women present greeted the assertion.

"No, but wait!" continued Miss Vinita, impressively. "She offers to bet me, any odds I name, that she will prove it to me inside of thirty days."

"Take the bet!" exclaimed Kirk Maitland, audaciously.

"Will you pay if I lose?"

"If you let me name the terms."

"Do you agree, Lil?"

Lil looked Kirk Maitland straight in the eye. She felt herself then beyond his ability to harm. She was to be the wife of Philip Sumner, and she felt that she could defy all the world.

"Yes, I agree!" she answered, unflinchingly.

He went up to her and stood there before her in presence of all the people in the room. He was laughing as if it were the veriest joke in which he was indulging, but there was something in his expression that Lil read as a dare—just as he intended that she should.

"Then my terms are these," he said, slowly, im-

pressively, while yet the lightness and jocularity of his manner remained: "If, at the end of the prescribed thirty days, you have not convinced us of the sincerity of your words by the announcement of a betrothal, you will be my wife."

There was a gasp from every one present. A silence fell upon the group where a burst of laughter might have been expected. Every one was looking expectantly at Lil. Once she half shrunk back as if she were about to decline the foolish terms, then something in his face, something of mockery which she could not bear, angered her beyond all reason.

She flung up her head haughtily, and forced a laugh she was far from feeling. It was not that she had any idea he would ever win the wager—oh, far from it! Her confidence in Philip Sumner was absolute, and as a vision of his dear face came before her, she answered, calmly:

"I accept the terms."

There was a noisy hand-clapping, a great deal of laughter, and others entering the room at the time had to have the bet explained.

"Do you mean to say that you will actually keep your word?" asked Felix, going up to Lil.

"If he wins, I will keep it. But there is no reverse side to the bet. If I win, what am I to receive?"

"My life insurance policy," answered Maitland, lightly, and at the same looking at her with curious intent.

She turned away with a slightly deprecating wave of the hand, and once again the *portière* was lifted.

It was Philip Sumner.

Lil went toward him. He took her hand with an

expressive tenderness that attracted the attention of every one in the rooms. The sweet color deepened in her cheeks. She turned to present him to some of those of her friends whom he had not met before.

‘I heard great merriment before I came,’ he said, when the introductions were over. ‘May I not know what it was about?’

‘We were making bets on certain engagements which are to be announced within thirty days!’ exclaimed Kirk Maitland, speaking rather loudly, his excitement showing itself in a heightened color.

‘And, by the way, that reminds me. I must congratulate you. I heard the announcement of *your* engagement just as I was leaving the club. I hope I am not premature, but Slater told me that he had just seen you, and you told him you were to be married to Miss Olive Langford on the twenty-fifth of September. Is it true, old man?’

CHAPTER XVII.

Philip Sumner stood for a moment as if confronting a deadly enemy, half stunned from surprise and consternation at the suddenness of the attack. He cast about him for something to say, some way of evading the question that had been so directly put. He glanced hastily at Lil.

She had grown ghastly in her pallor, and yet there was an unsteady smile upon her countenance as if she were listening for his denial of a story that must be absurd. And yet he knew that he dared not deny

it. Already representatives of the press were coming to him for confirmation of the story of his engagement to one of the season's belles and one of the greatest heiresses in the country. He knew that it would be a matter of only a week at best that he could hope to keep the fact quiet. Therefore, what was the good of a lie that he knew would so quickly find him out?

He could have throttled Maitland for his question, and yet he knew that he must quickly find an answer for it, and laughed shortly as he exclaimed:

"Slater is a fool! A fellow should at least be allowed the privilege of announcing his own engagement."

He loathed himself for the evasion, hated himself for the duplicity that he had practiced, as he had never hated his father for becoming the thief he believed him; and yet he could not retire from the position in which he had placed himself.

But he had counted too much upon Maitland's generosity. There was more at stake for the latter than Phil had reckoned, and with the dancing, glittering light deepening in his eyes, Kirk Maitland exclaimed, even more loudly than he had before spoken:

"Come off! That is no answer. You lovers are such wary chaps; but you must not expect to escape us this time. We are old friends, and deserve to know before the announcement is made to the rest of the world. Let us have it, old man. Is it true, or isn't it? A plain 'yes' or 'no' now."

Philip did not speak. He glanced half appealingly toward Lil, but she took a step forward and threw up her head. She had obtained full mastery

herself. She laughed slightly, though the glitter in her eye did not exactly blend with the sound of merriment.

"Mr. Maitland is quite correct!" she cried, her voice a trifle harder than usual. "We whom you have called your friends have a right to know that which concerns you so nearly. Is it true?"

There was nothing for it but truth. It is not often that a man tells it with such a note of shame in his voice; but when Philip Sumner spoke a breath of surprise went through the room. He tried to follow the example of the others and laugh, but it was a sorry effort. He strove to infuse his voice with lightness, but it was husky as from a heavy cold.

"I am run to earth!" he cried, in a terrible attempt at playfulness. "Won't any one come to my rescue? Is all my fun to be eternally spoiled because the little matter of matrimony is hanging over my head like that old 'sword of Damocles'?"

"Then it is true?" asked Mag, watching Lil half breathlessly.

"Yes," he cried, his voice taking a defiant ring, "it is true! But I hope I shall not lose my place among you because of that."

There was a hum of congratulation which he but half heard. His eyes were fixed upon Lil, blood-shot, heavy, anxious. But she had herself so completely in hand that she did not even change color. It surprised, distressed, chagrined him.

He dared not approach her then, and stood there beside Mag, trying to listen to the chaff in which she was indulging for his benefit, but not able to

hear it for the din occasioned by the beating of his own heart.

He saw Lil leave the room, and was about to make some excuse for following her, when he observed that Maitland had forestalled him.

She had gone to the dining-room to escape them, but almost before she had reached it Maitland was at her side.

"You see!" he cried, eagerly. "I told you so! I knew some months ago that they were to be married, and I warned you, but you would not believe me. You are convinced now, are you not?"

She turned and looked at him coldly.

"You are speaking with absolute incoherence," she said, quietly. "Why should you think that Mr. Sumner's engagement should be of such interest to me?"

He looked at her in surprise. He was not deceived and admired her more than he had ever done before for the brave fight that she was making against her emotions.

He made a gesture of deprecation.

"Let us be frank with each other!" he exclaimed with brutal candor. "Of course I know to whom it was that you expected to be engaged within thirty days. You must remember what I saw at the country dance, Lil. I am not saying this to anger you but simply because so much depends upon it, for me. Do you mean to keep to the terms of your bet, Lil?"

He was looking at her eagerly. She was haughty singularly uplifted in her icy coldness.

"If you win the bet, I shall pay it," she answered

frigidly. "But there are thirty days yet to expire before you can demand payment on a debt of honor. You have no right to speculate upon my private affairs, and I forbid it!"

She swept out of the room and he followed her, hating her, perhaps, more than he loved her at that moment.

He joined Mag upon his re-entrance to the *salon*. "Well," she whispered, "what news? Are you going to win or lose your bet? I rather fancied you were playing a trump card when you announced that betrothal."

He smiled enigmatically.

"The man who betrays his hand has small chance of winning."

"Look! She has gone into her *boudoir*, and he has followed her. I am quite convinced that our little iceberg is an iceberg no longer, and that she loves him."

Maitland's eyes were in the direction of Lil's *boudoir*. When he could make an excuse for leaving Miss Vinita he did so. He did not enter the *boudoir*, but—he knew the flat thoroughly, and he knew from what point he could overhear their conversation perfectly.

Lil turned when she observed that she had been followed into the sacred precincts of her own *boudoir*, and yet she was not surprised when she saw who it was that had come after her. Her first inclination was to send him from her, but she pulled herself together and smiled.

If he had been less excited he must have seen the glassy expression of her eyes, the determination for

revenge that sat there; but Philip Sumner was as thoroughly in love as it is possible for man to be. He was maddened by what he had done, by the thought of losing her, and he could think of nothing else. He went up to her passionately.

"Lil, Lil, my darling, forgive me!" he cried, remorsefully. "I would not have had this happen for a thousand worlds! You can not believe me so cruel, so utterly without manhood. Oh, Lil, listen to me! I worship you!"

She gazed into his eyes with a bitter smile.

"Pouf!" she exclaimed, lightly. "You are converting a mole-hill into a mountain with a vengeance. I hope you don't imagine for one moment that I am the broken-hearted heroine of a romantic novel, do you? Why, my dear fellow, when you entered the room to-night, and asked about the merri-ment that preceded you, I had just been telling my friends that within a month I should announce the fact of my own betrothal."

"Lil!"

"You look surprised. Can you not believe in the fact?"

"For God's sake, tell me that is not true!" he cried, hoarsely. "I could not bear it! To see you the wife of another man would be madness! Oh, Lil, can't you understand how impossible it would be to me?"

She stood back and looked up at him for a moment, indignation fighting with her grief.

"My dear Mr. Sumner," she said, slowly, "do you realize that what you are saying is an insult to me? Do you realize that in offering me your love you degrade me, insult the woman who is to be your

wife, and put an end to my respect for you? My heart is not so nearly broken, I do assure you, that I need the avowal of a passion which disgraces itself. I grant you that I am a dancing-girl, a woman supposed by the general public to be acceptable to men because she pleases the depravity in them; but the general public is not always right in its asservations concerning us. If you have shared in that opinion, it is quite time that you were learning your mistake."

"I have never thought anything of you that was not good and true," he answered, humbly. "I swear to you that, if I were free to follow the emotion that is bursting in my heart at this moment, I would ask you, and only you, to be my wife. But I am not free Lil, I can not explain the matter to you, because the secret is not mine, but that of another to whom I am bound by all the ties of nature as well as those of heaven. I am as surely fettered as the veriest slave. I mean no insult to your purity when I tell you that I adore you, that the only happiness of my soul is in your presence. If I were dying, you would let me speak and you would listen. Well, I am worse than dying. My whole soul is starving for want of you, and yet I must accept this marriage that has been thrust upon me for the sake of others who have a right to demand of me what they will, even to the giving up of my life. I can't make you understand this, Lil; but it is true—I swear it to you. If I had been allowed to tell you of this hateful engagement in my own way, you would have seen it differently. Oh! you can't hate me worse than I do myself for the duplicity that I have practiced; but if you knew what I have suffered, you might pity me. I was like the

drowning sinner who clutches at the straw which he hopes will keep him out of hell for another month or year. I know that I had not the right to do what I did; but, my God! surely something can be forgiven the man who is to be shut out forever into outer darkness. If, in his despair, he tries to catch one more glimpse of heaven, that should not eternally condemn him. Oh, Lil, darling, only tell me that you forgive me! Only that, dear! It will lighten the awful burden that I must bear. It seems to me that I never realized the hideous position as I do to-night in the light of your contempt. Sweet one, speak to me!"

He held out his hands appealingly. She did not understand half that he had said, but she knew that she loved him with all the strength of her long-silent heart. She could not decide what to do. One moment she knew that it must be to send him from her forever, and in the next her whole soul rebelled against such an edict. She had listened to his voice until it had crept into every corner of her throbbing heart, and as he put out his hands to her it required all the strength of her struggling soul to resist him.

She shrunk back, and putting her hands over her ears, cried desperately:

"Not now—not now! Give me time to think. Go, for God's sake! I have guests; I must return to them, and they must not suspect—suspect—"

She could not finish the sentence she had begun. She could not say to him: "They must not suspect that Kirk Maitland has struck a death-blow to my love;" and yet that is what she would have said if she had completed it.

Philip Sumner saw that she was suffering, and with a tenderness which a man only shows to the woman who is more than all the world to him, he took her hand and lifted it deferentially to his lips.

"I am going back to them now," he said, gently. "But promise before I go that I may see you again?"

"Once again," she answered, so low that Kirk Maitland did not hear, but he knew that the one concession had been granted because Philip Sumner left the room at once.

Maitland had resumed his old seat beside Mag when Lil rejoined them, and there was no indication whatever in his manner that he had heard that conversation which had told him so much, and neither Lil nor Philip suspected.

I sometimes wonder if it is because actresses possess the art of concealment so perfectly that they have the name of being heartless. Certainly one would have thought Lil so during the remainder of that evening, and even Mag murmured aside to Kirk Maitland:

"I was mistaken. The iceberg is herself again. I am rather glad, because Lil with a heart would not be Lil at all."

And Maitland smiled.

But they would not have thought it if they could have seen the poor, white face that was turned suddenly to Chetwynd when the door had closed upon the last guest. His expression was one of bewilderment, consternation, as she put out her hands to him helplessly.

"Chet!" she murmured, miserably—"Chet, for

God's sake, help me! Thank Heaven I can be myself to you. There is no reason why I should laugh and chatter while my heart is breaking, and it is breaking, Chet. I am the most miserable being in all the world!"

He sat down suddenly and she flung herself upon her knees beside him, her arms falling across his lap, her head upon them.

She could not see the whitened anguish of his countenance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I heard of your engagement only last evening, Miss Langford, and I wanted to congratulate you before your return to Burton. I hope you appreciate my generosity fully. It isn't every fellow that can pocket his pride and humiliation in this fashion, and come boldly to the front with a smile on his lips."

Kirk Maitland was standing before Olive Langford, holding her hand in his. She had just entered the room where he awaited her, and as he greeted her, a playful smile curved his rather handsome mouth. She laughed as she withdrew her hand and motioned him to a seat.

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed, meeting and answering his badinage. "I had waited for you to come to the point until patience ceased to interest. You are looking remarkably well for a man who is pocketing pride and humiliation. Usually when a man is

carrying such things about with him, he looks rather like one who is concealing dynamite. But who told you of the great event of perspective?"

"The happy man himself. But I predicted it ages ago."

"Really?"

"Bless me, yes! There was only one time when I had even a shadowy doubt of it."

"When was that?"

"You would be offended if I were to tell you."

"Not I."

"You mean that you are too happy to take offense at anything? It must be tremendously pleasant to be in love. Tell me, isn't it?"

She laughed slightly.

"I think that sort of thing has been relegated to the kitchen of late years!" she answered, indolently. "I really don't believe that Philip and I spoke of that phase of the case at all."

"You don't mean it?"

"I think I should have sent him right about face if he had expected that absurdity of me!" she exclaimed, with quiet indifference, leaning back in her chair and fanning herself slowly. "Of course it is all right enough for a man and his wife to be in love with each other, but to talk of it—Pouf! The cook and laundress usurped that privilege long ago. But come back. When was the only time you ever doubted that your prediction would be fulfilled. I promise that I shall not be in the very least offended."

He looked at her intently for a moment. She had not deceived him in the slightest particular. He

knew better than if she had told him that she loved Philip Sumner with a passion that would hesitate at nothing to acquire its ends, but he only smiled quietly as he answered:

"I was inclined to think that the little school-teacher in Burton was running you rather close last month. Now, you are indignant?"

He leaned toward her with the smile deepening about the mouth. He observed her redden, but there was no change in her voice as she replied:

"Not in the least. Why should I be? On the contrary, I think it something to have gained the supremacy when my rival was so beautiful a girl as Miss Esmonde. By the way, if I mistake not you were a trifle hard hit in that quarter yourself."

"I? By Jove! no. I knew her too well."

"Knew her too well! Why, what do you mean? Wasn't she what she appeared?"

"There! I beg that you won't ask me any further questions. I shouldn't have said that."

"But you interest me. I intended to ask her where she could be found on my return to New York, but forgot it the night of the dance, and did not see her afterward. Can you tell me?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"I liked her. I want to call upon her."

Kirk Maitland knew that she had lied, and yet he replied, as if he fully believed in the words that she had spoken:

"Oh, I say! You can't do that, you know!"

"Why not?"

"Well—er—the truth is, it won't do; that's all!"

"But I insist upon knowing. If you don't tell me where she lives, I shall discover for myself."

"By Jove! you make it hard for me," laughing, nevertheless. "The truth is, that, like the line in 'Pinafore,' Miss Esmonde is not what she seems. She is not a school-teacher at all."

Miss Langford suddenly sat up very straight. The color flashed into her cheeks. She gazed intently at Maitland.

"Then *what* is she?" she demanded.

"I wish you wouldn't compel me to tell you," answered Maitland, ruefully. "The fact is, I am half afraid."

"Please go on."

"Well, then, since you will have it, she is a *première danseuse*!"

"Mr. Maitland! And knowing that, you allowed me to receive that young woman in my house?"

Miss Langford had risen. Her cheeks were scorching in their heat.

"My dear Olive, what else was I to do?" cried Maitland, in well-simulated distress. "The first time I saw her down there at Burton, she made a very pretty plea to me to not tell the truth about her, and I gave her my word of honor that I would not betray her. She was afraid to have that straight-laced old father of hers know anything about it, because she knew that he would separate her from her mother and that little deformed sister whom she worships, and who is here with her now at the New York Hospital. If you could have heard the plea she made to me, you would not have blamed me for yielding. And after I had pledged my word, what could I do? Be-

side that, Lil is not a bad sort at all, I assure you."

"Lil! Then she is the person known as Lil the dancing-girl?"

"Yes?"

Miss Langford sat down again. The color had all faded from her cheeks; her lips were white and compressed, but there was a glitter in the gray eyes that did not escape Maitland.

"Did Philip Sumner know this?" she asked, slowly, when she had again controlled her voice.

"No, frankly, he did not—*then*."

"But he knows now?"

"Oh, yes. He found her out the first evening of his return—entered the room while she was dancing for some friends, I believe, and surprised her. Her friends were laughing over it heartily."

"Then she lives here in town?"

"Oh, yes; she has a flat fit for a princess in the Belleami. You would scarcely recognize in beautiful, gracious, dazzling Lil the demure little school-teacher who was present at your country dance. I was at her house last night to as gorgeous a feast as Vanderbilt could spread."

"Really? And do men of reputation actually go to such places?"

"Well, rather. There was some of the best men in town there last night. Why, Phil was there. Of course, he doesn't mind having you know, or he wouldn't have gone so soon after your engagement."

"Oh, of course not."

"I am afraid, just the same," with an assumption of an easy laugh, "that I was inconsiderate in speaking of it. You women are such peculiar creatures.

"You won't let a fellow make love to you, but you are indignant if he makes love to another girl. Rather dog-in-the-mangerish, isn't it?"

"You surely don't mean that Mr. Sumner was making love to—this woman?"

"Oh, no, no! Don't you understand me to say such a thing, for the world. By Jove! I had no idea it was so late. Is that clock I heard strike right?"

"Yes."

"Then I owe you an apology for having detained you so long. By the way, I hope it won't be necessary to ask you not to speak of the identity of pretty Lil in Burton?"

"Not at all. I am rather disappointed in what you have told me. I was hoping that I might have been of some advantage to her. Good-evening, Mr. Maitland. Remember, if you can get a few days from business, that it would be a positive charity to have you run up to Burton whenever you can."

"Thanks. You may be sure I shall not forget. Good-bye, and every happiness in the new life."

CHAPTER XIX.

Kirk Maitland was gone. Without a word, Olive Langford mounted the great, broad stair-way of her elegant home and entered her own room; but there was a whiteness and compression about the lips that would have been a warning to one accustomed to her moods. She walked deliberately over to the window, and stood there staring out into the warm sun-

light, down into the hot, dusty street, and watched him out of sight. Then she turned about, seeming to face herself rather than vacancy.

"And so," she said, aloud, slowly, "this is the meaning of it is it? It is that he is actually paying attentions to—worse than an actress—a *première danseuse*! H'm! Disgracing himself; bringing pity—actual pity from my friends upon me—and giving to her that which is mine by every right. Last night—two days betrothed, and I am left alone with his mother, while he seeks his pleasure in the society of a *première danseuse*! Verily it is a poetic beginning to a love-life! But it is her fault, curse her! He had never thought of wandering from me until she came with her loathsome beauty to tempt him from me. I see it all as clearly as if Kirk Maitland had told me all he knows. She came to Burton with those precious stories of her wonderful bravery and purity of life. She won his heart then from me; and now, when he has discovered her to be what she is, it is too late for him to take back his love—it is hers. He knows that he cannot make her his wife, and so he put me between him and that temptation, like the coward that hides behind the wall in battle. But he continues to give her his love, and she accepts it, feeling, knowing that she is robbing me of the best part of him and glorying in her ability to do it—her cursed triumph over me! But I will not give him up to her. Great heavens! I cannot. There are a thousand reasons which make that an impossibility; but I would not, if the power were mine. We shall see, my pretty dancer, who shall win!"

She sat down calmly, deliberately in an armchair

near the window, and went methodically to work to recall every word of the interview that had just passed between her and Kirk Maitland. She weighed the points with a care that would have done credit to a general in time of war. Her lips were set and white; but there was no wild impulse of passion in her manner to excuse her act, no torturing anguish to palliate her offence—nothing but premeditated revenge.

She arose deliberately and went to the writing-table at the corner of the room. She sat down quietly, and first wrote a note to her father.

“DEAR OLD DAD,” it began—“I find that it will be impossible for me to get back to Burton on the day expected. You will know how to make excuses that will cover my absence, which is imperative at present. It is in connection with that precious matter of which I have already written you. I am not wasting my time in Elysian Fields, I assure you, but will explain everything when I see you. Your ever-loving and dutiful daughter, OLIVE.”

The “dutiful” she underscored, while a grim smile shadowed her tightly drawn lips.

She sealed and addressed the letter, and then began another with equal deliberation, though the handwriting was not in the very least the same. The most gifted expert in chirography would have found it difficult to have traced a point of resemblance, and yet she wrote the second letter with almost as much ease and rapidity as she had done the first.

“If Jonathan Esmonde wishes to know the real character of the life that his daughter Lillian is lead-

ing—that daughter to whom he has confided the care of his little, deformed child—he may learn it by coming at once to New York. If he will come on the train leaving Burton at 9 a. m., Wednesday, he will be met at the depot in New York by one who will give him all the information he seeks.”

That was all; but she folded the cruel thing with as much care as she had bestowed upon the other, addressed it, then took both to the letter-box, and posted them with her own hands.

There was not the slightest expression of regret upon her countenance when the letter fell into the box, and she knew that it was gone beyond recall. She did not even look back as she left it there to go upon its hateful mission. She walked away as quietly and erectly as she had come, only that there was a subdued light of triumph in her hard gray eyes.

Since Amy had been in New York, Jonathan Esmond had visited the little country post-office more often than he had ever done before, for there were two daughters to hear from now.

He had not said much in encouragement of Lillian's plan with regard to Amy, but there was great hope in his silent soul of the good results that might be accomplished.

And so it was with eagerness that he tore open his letters, anxious for the latest news. It was seldom that he received a communication through the mails except from either Amy or Lillian, and therefore he did not stop to look at the handwriting upon the envelope when the post-master threw out a letter on the day after the mailing of that epistle in New York.

But when Jonathan Esmonde had read it, he stopped and grew as white as the cotton shirt he had put on fresh in which to go to town.

He did not understand it in the least, and read it again and again before he could bring himself to any comprehension of its contents. He lifted his hand to his head in a dazed sort of way and repeated aloud:

"If Jonathan Esmonde wishes to know the real character of the life that his daughter Lillian is leading! If Jonathan Esmonde wishes to know— What can it mean? Don't I know what sort of life my girl is leading? Don't I know she is teachin'— Good God! it couldn't be my Lillian has— Oh, sho'! You old fool, ain't you never learned no better sense than to pay attention to people as ain't got nerve enough to sign their name to a letter? You grow a greater fool every day you live, Jonathan Esmonde!"

But for all his philosophy he was more silent than ever as he made the few purchases his wife had requested, and ever before his eyes those words seemed to dance wildly, like the writing upon the wall at the feast of Belshazzar: "If Jonathan Esmonde wishes to know the real character of the life that his daughter Lillian is leading!"

His back was bent more than ever as he climbed into the spring-wagon and turned the old horse's head toward home.

He took the letter out of his pocket and read it again as he rode along, and then he tried bravely to philosophize as he had done before, but it didn't come readily to his mind or his lips.

"Any letters?" his wife asked, cheerily, as he drove into the yard.

"No!" he answered, grimly.

There was nothing he had always detested more than a lie, and he hated himself for the utterance of that one, but he quieted his conscience by saying to himself:

"There ain't no use a-worryin' her over it."

He sat down to his supper in grim silence. Once or twice Mrs. Esmonde tried to make conversation, but it was a flat failure, and she gave it up in despair at last.

"It seems lonesomer than ever sence Lily took Amy with her, don't it father?" she said, when they had mounted the stairs to their little room.

He answered only with a grunt, and one that she could not translate, then they went to bed in silence.

But Jonathan Esmonde did not sleep. His wife lay there breathing peacefully, but the sting of suspicion had entered his soul. In whichever way he turned he saw those cruel words, blood-red, glaring before his eyes.

He arose the following morning with a dull pain across his eyes, and a haggard whiteness upon his brow that was most unaccustomed.

"Why, Jonathan, what in the name o' sense air you a-doin' with your Sunday clothes on and this only Wednesday, and that hay-field to cut?" asked his wife, when he had descended to the breakfast-room a little later than usual, dressed in his best blue jeans.

He turned his eyes from her guiltily.

"I ain't a-goin' to cut the hay-field to-day Miranda."

"Why? And it all burned up now with the sun."

"It kin wait another day."

"Where air you goin'?"

There was a sullen determination upon his countenance when he replied, an expression that indicated something of the shame that he felt at the resolution he had taken. He did not look at her, and her breath almost left her body in her surprise as he replied:

"I am a-goin' to New York on the nine-o'clock train!"

CHAPTER XX.

Lil and Chetwynd breakfasted together the following morning. It was late, after twelve o'clock, but in the white face of each, one could read the lack of sleep.

They were very silent, in fact scarcely a word had been spoken during the entire meal, and it was not until after his cigar had been lighted, upon their return to Lil's *boudoir*, that Chetwynd began to show the nervousness that was oppressing him.

He got up and walked about, his movements reminding one of those of a panther in a cage, circumscribed as he was by the small, dainty well-filled room. Lil was seated beside the window, looking out in a listless half-unconscious way, and did not know that he was moving until he struck against a table littered with silver toilet knick-knacks—a thing most unusual for the lithe, graceful dancing-master—then she lifted her head and looked at him.

"You are nervous, Chet," she said, as if she had but just discovered the fact. "Come and sit down, won't you?"

The voice was not in the least like Lil's. It was strained, and dull, and hollow, like that of a person who has served a long apprenticeship in the school of suffering, and yet has never learned resignation. Chetwynd stopped in his walk and looked at her sorrowfully; then he went and drew up a chair near her.

"Lil," he said, gently, "I want to talk to you, dear, and I scarcely know how to begin. It seems to me as if you were on the verge of some great calamity, and that my hand alone could save you, and yet I half fear to stretch it forth. Lil, you know that—I love you, dear?"

There was something in the tone, a low tremulous earnestness, that would have told a listening woman all the painful, pitiful truth, but Lil was not listening that way. She heard the words, but nothing more.

"Yes," she answered, gratefully. "I know you love me, Chet, as my father ought to, and perhaps does in his own way."

He winced. She had hurt him more than a dagger thrust could have done; but with his old patience and generosity he hid his pain, gulped down his anguish and continued, softly:

"I said nothing to you last night, little one, because well, because your grief and my own surprise silenced me. I listened to you in sympathy, but without a word of advice, because I felt myself incapable of giving it, but—I did not sleep last night, Lil. All night I was thinking of you, and your terrible sorrow, thinking of the stand that you had taken, and—and—Oh, Lil, I wish I could make you understand how I suffered through it!"

The wistful sorrow even then did not touch her,

and yet she stretched out her hand to him gratefully.

"I do understand it, Chet," she said slowly.

"Then you will let me advise you? You will listen to me?"

"Yes. You know I will."

"Then little one, give up Philip Sumner. A man capable of what he has done is not worthy of your slightest thought. Be true to yourself, dear. The betrothed husband of another woman should be sacred. Forbid his entering your presence, Lil!"

She snatched her hand from him and covered her face with it for a moment, then she arose slowly and stood there, her white, passionate face turned toward him.

"I can't!" she cried hoarsely. "I can't! I tell you I love him better than I do my life! Do you think I have not fought with myself? Do you think I have not tried to conquer? Oh, Chet, what do you know of love? You stand there in your impregnable coldness and chatter of a thing of which you have never experienced one thought, even in dreams. You know no more of it than a polar bear would, and yet—Chet, for God's sake, what is the matter with you?"

He had leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. A blue line had grown around his white lips. His face was ghastly, its muscles twitching convulsively. There was an appearance of absolute physical pain in his countenance, and Lil fell upon her knees at the side of this man who had been the truest, most loyal friend she had ever known, and placed her hand upon his face to turn it toward her.

If a seering iron had touched him he could not have

shrunk from it more, and yet he opened his eyes and smiled bravely into her own.

"Nothing," he answered, gently. "I was only listening."

She sank back upon the floor with her feet under her, her hands fallen in her lap, and looked up at him.

"A man does not turn white like that who is merely listening," she said, slowly. "I am afraid I have been selfish, old fellow, thinking only of my own suffering, while you— What is it, old friend? Aren't you well?"

The expression of his face was almost of disgust. He waved his hand deprecatingly.

"There is nothing the matter with me. Go on! What were you saying?"

She regarded him intently while she replied:

"I was just saying that you knew no more about love than a polar bear whose every sentiment has been frozen in the ice that belongs to him by habit, and without which he could not exist."

Not a muscle of his face moved, and yet, when she had finished the sentence, she sat there staring up at him in a stupid sort of way, as if a book in an unknown language had been opened before her eyes and a great desire had seized her to know its contents.

He had closed his eyes again.

"Go on!" he said, with a half-cynical smile playing about his lips.

She hesitated for some time, so long, in fact, that he opened his eyes slightly and looked at her. Her own were still fixed curiously upon his face. She had apparently forgotten herself.

"I have suddenly doubted the truth of my own statement," she said, hesitatingly. "You told me

last night, Chet, that you had never made love to a girl in your life. Was it true?"

"Quite true."

"But that was—not saying that—you had never loved one, was it, old man?"

He hesitated a moment, then answered painfully:

"No, dear. That was—not saying that I—had never—loved one."

"Oh, Chet!" she gasped. "Somehow I feel as if my inexperienced hand had suddenly opened an awful wound which had hurt you—uselessly. Forgive me, will you, old friend?"

"There is nothing to forgive," he answered, painfully. "You have done no wrong. And even if you had, there need never be any talk of forgiveness between you and me, Lil!"

"And it was—it was unhappy, Chet?" she asked tremulously.

He smiled bitterly.

"She thought no more of me, dear," he answered piteously, "than she would have thought of air. It was a necessity, but nothing more—nothing thought of, nothing loved. And yet—and yet—*God!* I would have died to win a look from her eye—a look even of the recognition of my love without reciprocation. But it is all vain, all hopeless. There! I did not intend to tell you this. You rather surprised it from me. That is all!"

"And I never knew! I never suspected! Oh, Chet!"

He smiled grimly, then quoted slowly, with a dense, subdued sort of passion:

“With the river’s roar of passion
Is blended the dying groan;
But here, in the halls of fashion,
Hearts break and make no moan.
And the music, swelling and sweeping,
Like the river, knows it all;
But none are counting or keeping
The lists of those who fall.”

There was a long silence. She had crept closely to him. Her beautiful head rested against his knee. She knew his secret—in part, but no thought of the object of his idolatry had entered her head. She did not ask, for fear of embarrassing him, but the possibility that it could be she, herself, had never came to her.

And so she sat there with her head against his knee, thinking while he suffered.

He mastered himself at last and laid his hand calmly upon the lovely auburn hair.

She lifted her face and smiled at him sadly.

“Do you think now, dear, that I can advise you?” he asked, gently.

“Yes Chet.”

“Then promise me this: that you will not see Philip Sumner again.”

She hesitated a moment, then answered slowly:

“I can not promise that for this reason: Other men who are even married come here. If I were to forbid his coming, I should have to confess to my friends that he was the man to whom I—I referred last evening. I should be forced to acknowledge by act, if not by word, that I had been deceived—jilted. I can’t do

that, old fellow. My pride won't let me. But I will promise you this: that he shall never speak another word of love to me. Will that satisfy you, old man?"

"Yes, if you can trust yourself, Lil."

"I shall learn self-control of—you," she answered, gently.

A peal at the door-bell interrupted them. It was answered by the maid, and a man entered hastily.

"You, Felix!" exclaimed Lil. "How kind of you!"

"Not kind to-day!" he cried, shaking hands, while he held his hat and nodded to Chetwynd.

"Why? Give your hat to—"

"No, no; I'm in an awful hurry. I've only come to ask a favor. You remember the benefit for the Sick Babies' Fund?"

"Yes."

"It was to have taken place last week, but was postponed because of the illness of Nathalie Vinita until to-night; and now Carmalita, upon whom they have principally depended, pretends to be ill, but in reality is in one of her usual tantrums. I have come to ask if you will save the whole thing from financial as well as artistic failure by taking her place. I want to know at once, so that an immediate announcement can be made. It will mean a great deal to the babies, as you are perfectly aware that there is no woman in New York, barring yourself, who could hope to draw a house in this beastly weather. Will you do it?"

"Of course I will. To-night, you say?"

"Yes."

"But it is too late for an announcement."

"No. There will be ample time for the afternoon

papers, and some special arrangement will be made about the clubs."

"All right. I shall be glad to do what I can for the babies."

"A thousand thanks. You've saved us. I shall lead the orchestra, so that you need not fear for the music. Ta-ta! Be sure you are on time."

"You may count upon me. Come to supper after the performance."

"Thank's again. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXI.

The train that left Burton at 9 a. m. was two hours late, and yet, in spite of that fact, a woman stood patiently upon the platform awaiting it.

She was not a stylish woman, although her form was slight and well-shaped, her black gown not fitting her so well as it should have done, and yet not attracting attention from its ill fit. Her hair was slightly sprinkled with gray, and was worn after the present fashion among the under classes of middle-aged women, an inconspicuous bonnet surmounting it. Her ringless hands were incased in black lace mitts, and her eyes shaded by a pair of ordinary students' glasses.

There was nothing about her to attract the slightest attention aside from her motionless attitude as the train rolled up to the platform, but there was a nervous grasp at the handle of a well-worn umbrella

she carried as an old countryman stepped almost feebly from the train.

Jonathan Esmonde was a youngish man, in spite of the fact that he had been referred to half his life as "Old Jonathan Esmonde." He was bent from hard and continuous labor, and his hair was grizzled, but he had always been as strong as an ox, and had never known a moment of real fatigue in his life; yet, as he stepped from that train, he seemed to have aged years in the few short hours since receiving that anonymous letter.

He leaned heavily on his cane as he ambled from the train and glanced hastily about him. He had never been in a city before in his life, and New York is a big place to a man who has been accustomed to Burton. Therefore he felt more lonely than he ever remember feeling before—lonely and lost and weary, aside from a certain stinging sensation of disgust with himself for paying any attention to the communications of an anonymous correspondent.

He rather hoped, in a vague and undefined sort of way, that there would be no one there to meet him, as he had already decided what he should do in such an event, and he became a shade paler as he saw that a woman had started toward him.

He stopped still and looked at her scutinizingly, nothing in the least inviting confidence in his haggard countenance, and she paused a moment before saying, in a low, almost thrilling tone:

"Are you Jonathan Esmonde?"

"Yes, ma'am, I be," he answered, with more genuine dignity in his hard face than had ever been there

before. "And be you the—the woman as sent me a letter about—about my daughter?"

She hesitated a moment before replying. Either she had not anticipated the question, or she had changed her plans with regard to what she would say to him, for she seemed to consider before saying:

"I am not! The—lady who wrote that letter is ill, and could not come herself, and so she sent me."

"You mean she didn't have the courage to face the lie she had put on that paper!" he cried, indignantly.

"No," replied the woman, courteously. "I do not mean that. The lady has acted only in a spirit of friendliness toward you. She has seen your daughter, and she—she pities you—her father—who have been so deceived in the story that she has told you—in the lie which she has lived."

"What is it you air a-sayin?" demanded old Jonathan, straightening himself up. "I'll not listen to you! I wus a fool fur a-comin', that's what I wus, an' if there wus a train goin' back now, I'd take it!"

A cynical smile curved the woman's lips.

"Why?" she sneered. "Because you fear to put my words to the test. Because something telis you that I have spoken only the truth?"

"No!" cried Jonathan, harshly. "Because I know it is a lie!"

"Then you have but to test it. If you are not afraid come with me!"

She stood there before him, looking into his face. From hard defiance, his expression began to grow shrinking. Something of the same doubt that had assailed him in the darkness of the preceding night came

again. It was like the voice of the devil pleading in his ear.

"Go on!" he said, hoarsely.

She turned away. In spite of the long day it was already dark, and the lights from the city blinded the old countryman.

The whirl of carriages, the calls of the drivers, the noise of the street cars and loaded trucks bewildered him; and he stood in the door of the Grand Central Depot, looking about him in a way that was pitiful.

It might have touched the heart of another woman, but the one beside him only laid her hand upon his arm, as if to hasten him.

"Have you had any dinner?" she asked. "Do you want anything to eat?"

He looked at her for a moment as if he scarcely comprehended the question she had put, then answered huskily:

"I don't want nothin'. It 'ud choke me!"

In spite of the plainness of her attire, she led him toward a cab that had been previously engaged, and hurried him into it. He obeyed her as if he were acting under the influence of hypnotism, and after she had spoken a few words to the driver she took her seat beside him.

When the door had closed he turned to her almost pleadingly:

"For God's sake!" he cried, "tell me what all this means? Where is my daughter?"

"I am going to take you to her," answered the woman, resolutely. "You would never take my word if I were to tell you the sort of life that your daughter is leading. You would tell me again that I had lied;

but for the respect I bear you and your poor wife, in order that I may save you the disgrace that will fall upon you when your neighbors discover the truth, I am going to prove my words even before they are spoken. If I do not succeed, you may then call me the liar that you try to believe me and can not!"

Jonathan Esmonde did not reply. It seemed to him that the power had left him. He leaned back among the cushions as the cab rattled over the rough cobblestones, and looked out at the lights with eyes that saw nothing. He seemed to be suddenly drawn up and withered, but it inspired no pity in the heart of the woman beside him.

It was in front of a theater, one of the largest and most imposing in the metropolis, that the cab stopped. The blaze of lights in front almost dazzled the old countryman. He saw a board in front of him, as he descended from the cab, with great black letters upon it, announcing:

BENEFIT
FOR THE
SICK BABIES' FUND.

But that told Jonathan Esmonde nothing. He glanced about him in a puzzled, bewildered sort of way, then stopped still upon the sidewalk.

"What's this?" he demanded of the woman beside him.

"A theater," she answered, laconically.

"What have I got to do with theaters?" he demanded. "I ain't a-goin' in there."

"If you want to see your daughter Lillian, you will," she replied, resolutely.

"My daughter Lillian in there—in a theater? What are you a-talkin' about? Why, she's a respectable member o' the Methodist church an' wus never in a theater in her life."

The woman laid her hand upon his arm.

"Are you going to make your trip to New York useless?" she questioned in a hard tone.

And again he listened to the voice of the devil.

Reluctantly he allowed her to lead him inside the theater. The buzz of the fans, the hum of conversation, the heat of the atmosphere sickened him, but she led him on relentlessly. Because of the lateness of the hour at which the announcement of Lil's appearance had been made, she had been unable to obtain as good seats as she desired, but she knew that the stage was well seen from any part of the auditorium, and therefore seated herself beside the old countryman with a feeling of relief.

She observed the grayish color of his face as he looked around upon that assemblage, but there was nothing particularly objectionable in it so far as he could see. There were girls in beautiful gowns, selling flowers and programmes. One even attempted to fasten a white carnation in his button-hole, but when she saw him shrink away she let him alone. But the very thought of being in a theater, that palace of the devil, was horrible to him. He was trembling in every limb, and as he seated himself in the luxurious orchestra chair, he tried to shrink as far back as possible, vainly imagining that he could hide himself from himself.

And then the overture was rung in.

The din of the orchestra, with the hum of the voices

and the heat of the atmosphere, made his head ache more than ever, and more than once he would have escaped, but that woman was sitting there beside him, bolt upright, and he shrunk back as if he were held by a force that he had no power on earth to combat.

After what seemed to him an age, the curtain went up and a woman with a disgustingly low corsage came upon the stage to sing. It was awful to the old Methodist, who had never seen anything beyond Burton in his life, and a groan left his lips. He would not look again, but sat there with his head bowed upon his hands, hating himself as he had never hated any living being before.

Once or twice he lifted his head as some thunderous reception told him that a new favorite had come before the audience; but each time it was dropped again, until at last when a girl made an appearance in tights to do a contortion act, then he staggered to his feet.

"I can't stand it!" he cried hoarsely, disgust and horror mingling in his voice. "I can't stand it! It's a burnin' shame to let them undressed women come before decent people, and I shan't never look Miranda in the face again. I am a-goin'!"

"Wait!" she whispered in his ear. "Wait. Your daughter is next upon the programme. You must not fail to see her?"

And once more, but this time with his chin fallen, his eyes wide in awful horror, Jonathan Esmonde fell back in his chair—and waited.

CHAPTER XXII.

The orchestra had completed a prelude that ended in a wild, fantastic melody, and the audience had burst into an enthusiastic applause that shook the play-house from pit to dome. It seemed that it would never end, and there, standing before them, bowing and smiling in her flimsiest of gauze draperies, stood Lil—Lil the dancing-girl, Lil the favorite of all New York.

The costume she wore of the Persian type, with pale gauze covering the fleshings upon her limbs, the part of her body over the stomach covered with flesh-colored silk drawn so tight as to resemble nature's mold, a spangled jacket relieving her of absolute immodesty, a jacket that revealed the exquisite neck and shoulders in all their dazzling bodily splendor.

To the New Yorker, accustomed to the stage, there was nothing in the attire beyond the ordinary undress of the *première danseuse*, but to old Jonathan Esmonde it was something beyond all compare in the line of brazen shamelessness.

He half staggered to his feet, but a hand was placed upon his arm, which drew him back into his seat.

He sat there, leaning forward breathlessly, watching the changing smile upon her face—that beautiful face which he had never seen before under the paint and powder that adorned it now—never speaking, but white to the lips, white and haggard as death itself.

He was like one under the influence of some hideous nightmare, a horror that holds one enthralled under its ghastly spell, and from which one has not

the power to free one's self, even though the soul is choked and sickened by the influence.

Stonily, dully, stupidly he gazed, only half conscious that she was dancing, only half conscious of the shouts of "bravo" that rent the air when some exceedingly difficult step was rendered with a facility that bespoke the consummate artiste, only half conscious of the thunders of applause and wild calls as the orchestra ceased; but his breath came at last and he panted wildly, chokingly, when she had disappeared behind the wings.

He arose suddenly, blindly, and put out his hand gropingly.

"Let me out!" he cried, hoarsely. "For God's sake, let me out!"

With a smile of gratified revenge upon her heartless face, the woman arose. She even put her hand upon the man's arm and led him from the building, steadying his tottering footsteps as he reached the welcome street, and stood there staring helplessly about him.

There was an expression upon the usually hard face like that of a lost child, a piteous, tremulous look about the mouth, a frightened bewilderment in the eyes, a trembling of the lips and hands that would have appealed to one less hard of heart, but not to that woman!

She had never learned the meaning of pity. There was one word that formed the nucleus of her heart and the central portion of every thought that took shape in her brain. It was "Self!" For self alone she cared, for self alone she waited and watched and worked.

She smiled at him half bitterly, half sneeringly as they reached the corner of the street. It was her intention to abandon him then and there in the city, where he was as much a stranger and as much at sea as the veriest toddler would have been, but she could not refrain from asking one question first.

"Are you convinced now? Does it require further evidence to make you understand the sort of life your daughter is leading? Do you still doubt?"

He shrunk from her as he might have done from some poisonous reptile, and covered his poor old face with his hands.

She laughed outright.

"It is a charming school that your beautiful Lillian teaches, is it not?" she sneered.

But there was more loyalty in the old farmer than she had counted upon. He threw down his hands and turned upon her, his lips quivering between an uncontrollable shame and a defiance that was even more piteous. His eyes were blood-shot, his face ghastly and twitching, as if with physical anguish.

"It ain't true!" he cried, hoarsely. "That wa'n't my girl! I won't believe it! That couldn't never be my Lily, my sweet little modest flower! You've tricked me fur some evil purpose uv yer own, an' it's a lie! I tell you, it's a lie! It wus only some 'un that looked like her, and you brung me here an' made me believe this foul lie fur some reason uv yer own. God knows I don't know what! I'm a-past knowin' the motives uv mean, selfish women, but that's what you air! What's my daughter Lily to you, that you should try to disgrace her with her own old father?"

The fierce defiance of the tone seemed for a moment

to stun the creature who bore the name of woman. She stood there sullenly staring at him, then the old sneer returned to her mouth.

"Oh, you still doubt?" she said, with emotion. "I thought the evidence of your own eyes would convince you; but as it seems you do not wish to be convinced, I will show you further."

She had suddenly recalled what Maitland had said of the beautiful flat in the Belleami, and, with diabolical intent, again laid her hand upon the man's arm and directed his steps toward the cab, which was still in waiting.

Already great numbers of people were hurrying from the theater—people who had gone merely for the purpose of seeing Lil dance, and who had left immediately after—so that the confusion upon the street was even greater than it had been in the theater.

In spite of his horror of the woman, it seemed to Jonathan Esmonde that there was something about her that impelled him to do her will. He followed her meekly and entered the cab again.

And as he sat there, thinking, thinking, the impression that he had really seen Lillian, his daughter, there in that shameless way before that multitude of people, passed from him as if it had been the effect of a dream. He ceased to realize that it could have been; he began to believe that he had had some awful dream, and that it was passing.

The night breeze cooled his hot cheeks. The woman sat back in her own corner of the cab in silence. He looked around, after a time, to see if she were really there, and shuddered as he saw her, under the street-light

Yet even then it was a dream to him. The woman upon the stage had ceased to bear any resemblance whatever to Lillian. She, the dancer, was one of those painted creatures of the people whom he had heard dwelt in great cities—one of those depraved, wanton things whose name no man speaks without a blush—not his daughter!

He laughed aloud—a hoarse, discordant laugh, it is true, and one that he hushed because it frightened him; then he cried aloud:

“You thought to make me believe that creature to be my Lily; but I ain’t sich a fool as that—I ain’t sich a fool! She wa’n’t no more like my Lily than Beelzebub is like a pure white angel! An’ you almost made me believe she looked like my girl!—you almost made me believe it!”

The woman did not reply to him. She had not given the cabman instructions to drive at once to the Belleami, as she wanted to give Lillian time to arrive there before her father’s entrance to the flat, and it was full an hour from the time of their leaving the theater until she gave the address to the man—then, only after Jonathan Esmonde had exclaimed:

“Lemme out o’ this thing! I tell you I won’t go no further! I think you air an agent o’ the devil, an’ I am a-gittin’ my deserts fur a-comin’ down here on this wild-goose chase. Lemme out, I say!”

“Wait!” she had exclaimed, authoritatively.

And then she had given the cab-driver instructions to go at once to the Belleami.

She placed her hand again upon the arm of the old countryman, and almost forced him to the door of the house. She spoke for a moment aside to the elevator

boy who had charge of the door; then, with the grim smile still upon her lips, she motioned Jonathan Esmonde to follow her.

All unconscious of what he was doing, the boy took them to the floor upon which Lil's flat was situated, and pointed out the door.

With a hand that trembled somewhat from expectancy, the woman rang the bell. Almost instantly the door was thrown open. There were never any questions asked at these informal Bohemian gatherings.

The woman pushed Jonathan Esmonde inside, and followed him. Intuitively she lifted the *portière* leading to the *salon*, in which she heard the merry hum of laughing voices.

In the center of the room stood Lil, her superb throat wound with a string of magnificent diamonds, her arms and *décolleté* corsage ablaze with precious gems, her eyes brighter than any that shone upon her.

Jonathan Esmonde's companion ground her teeth for one moment, then she took the old man by the shoulders and pushed him into the room.

He stood there for one moment, dazed, then Lil's eyes were directed toward him.

The color vanished from her lovely cheeks, a light of horror took the place of the pleasure in her eyes, and one word left her lips:

"Father!"

There was a ghastly cry from Jonathan Esmonde. He flung up his hands, as if to shut out the awful sight, and stood there for one moment in stony silence; then, lifting up his voice, he cried out:

"Good God! what have I done that such a disgrace

should be reserved fur me? What have I done that I should be the father uv a thing like that?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

The silence that fell upon what had been but a moment before a merry party, seemed almost tangible in its terrible tensity. Lil stood there like a statue, the horror frozen into her face. The wild blood-shot eyes of her father were fixed upon her in shrinking loathing.

And then a sense of cringing shame came upon her. She would have covered herself from that awful gaze if that had been possible, but as she glanced swiftly about her she saw nothing at hand with which she could conceal the indecency of fashionable undress.

She crossed her hands upon her bosom, her chin bowed upon them, and took a dramatic step in his direction, but he waved her back with a dignity that was tragic.

"You do well to cover yer shameless nakedness!" he cried out, bitterly; "but it does not lessen the disgrace upon that poor old trusting woman who bore you, nor the man who gave you life. I went there to-night, to that den of infamy, but I could not believe the evidence of my old eyes when I saw you there in your wanton shame. I called the woman a liar that told me it was my girl, the one uv whom her father wus so proud. I never could a-dreamed that it wus *you* who lied—that it wus *you* who had posed as the brave saint while she lived a life of—crime!"

boy who had charge of the door; then, with the grim smile still upon her lips, she motioned Jonathan Esmonde to follow her.

All unconscious of what he was doing, the boy took them to the floor upon which Lil's flat was situated, and pointed out the door.

With a hand that trembled somewhat from expectancy, the woman rang the bell. Almost instantly the door was thrown open. There were never any questions asked at these informal Bohemian gatherings.

The woman pushed Jonathan Esmonde inside, and followed him. Intuitively she lifted the *portière* leading to the *salon*, in which she heard the merry hum of laughing voices.

In the center of the room stood Lil, her superb throat wound with a string of magnificent diamonds, her arms and *décolleté* corsage ablaze with precious gems, her eyes brighter than any that shone upon her.

Jonathan Esmonde's companion ground her teeth for one moment, then she took the old man by the shoulders and pushed him into the room.

He stood there for one moment, dazed, then Lil's eyes were directed toward him.

The color vanished from her lovely cheeks, a light of horror took the place of the pleasure in her eyes, and one word left her lips:

"Father!"

There was a ghastly cry from Jonathan Esmonde. He flung up his hands, as if to shut out the awful sight, and stood there for one moment in stony silence; then, lifting up his voice, he cried out:

"Good God! what have I done that such a disgrace

should be reserved fur me? What have I done that I should be the father uv a thing like that?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

The silence that fell upon what had been but a moment before a merry party, seemed almost tangible in its terrible tensity. Lil stood there like a statue, the horror frozen into her face. The wild blood-shot eyes of her father were fixed upon her in shrinking loathing.

And then a sense of cringing shame came upon her. She would have covered herself from that awful gaze if that had been possible, but as she glanced swiftly about her she saw nothing at hand with which she could conceal the indecency of fashionable undress.

She crossed her hands upon her bosom, her chin bowed upon them, and took a dramatic step in his direction, but he waved her back with a dignity that was tragic.

"You do well to cover yer shameless nakedness!" he cried out, bitterly; "but it does not lessen the disgrace upon that poor old trusting woman who bore you, nor the man who gave you life. I went there to-night, to that den of infamy, but I could not believe the evidence of my old eyes when I saw you there in your wanton shame. I called the woman a liar that told me it was my girl, the one uv whom her father wus so proud. I never could a-dreamed that it wus *you* who lied—that it wus *you* who had posed as the brave saint while she lived a life of—crime!"

"Father!"

"Never ag'in!" he cried, hoarsely, throwing up his arm to ward her from him. "Never ag'in! I own no daughter but the little deformed thing that you stole from me with yer treachery and lies. Never dare to breathe the word. You have no father, no sister, no mother. You stand alone in the world side by side with the fallen things of earth that possess no being, no soul. Ye stand accursed among women, too depraved to touch the skirt even uv yer own mother, the woman who bore you. You wa'n't satisfied wi' yer life o' shame an' infamy, but you must bring it beneath my roof, and disgrace me in the eyes of the people who have known an' respected me all the days uv my life. You've separated yourself from the sister that worshiped ye, fur the sake o' them diamonds that cover you, and that air the brand o' shame upon you. You've shet yourself out from that mother that cradled ye in the very holler uv her soul, an' you've broke yer ole father's heart!"

His voice trembled, but as Lil would have approached him, he again waved her back.

"No!" he cried, his voice rolling like thunder under his excitement. "Not a step—not a step! I've got nothin' but curses fur ye. Nothin' but curses fur the child that has been—*bought* with gold! Nothin' but curses fur the creature that deserts a life uv upright honesty an' godliness for the pollution that surrounds you now—the golden hell in which you live!"

And then for the first time a crimson streak of indignation flashed across Lil's beautiful face. She flung out her arms with a magnificent breadth of gesture.

"It is false!" she cried, in a tone that matched his own. "You are insulting your own flesh and blood with a lie that should scorch your lips with flame!"

He pointed his finger at her relentlessly, quivering with scorn and disgust.

"Cover yourself ag'in!" he thundered, passionately. "If it is only with a hand that can not conceal your shame. Don't stand there, forgetful that your father is beneath your sin-stained roof. Hide yourself from the eyes of decency. And the curses uv yer own father be upon you. The curses uv the man that gave you life. The curses uv the God you wus brought up to fear an' love. You'll face the shame you've brung upon yourself an' the family that loved you. May your life wither an' perish, and drop frum ye, leaf by leaf, leaving ye to realize the thing you air, leaving ye to see the terrible sin you have committed, eaten to the heart with bitter repentance that can bring no expiation. May they all desert ye, these creatures that you've sold yer soul fur, and may poverty an' beggary end the life that you colored black wi' iniquity. May ye crawl frum door to door scourged with the shame you've brung upon yourself and a God-fearing family, finding no relief frum God nor man, afflicted, homeless, alone. A father's curse upon ye furever an' furever!"

For some time those gathered there had listened in a sort of horrified silence, but as the old man continued, a low hum had begun that gradually increased, until, as he had finished, there was a loud exclamation of terror from the women and bitter indignation from the men.

More than one took a threatening step in the direction of the almost crazed man; but before they could

reach him, he had turned, with his hand uplifted, and had almost run from the room.

The woman who had brought him there disappeared, but he seemed to have forgotten her. Swiftly, totteringly, blindly, he rushed toward the stairs, forgetful of the elevator in which he had come up, and scarcely knowing what he did, he fled down the stairs and out into the night.

Meantime, the greatest confusion prevailed in the room that he had deserted.

As the last word of his curse left his lips, Lil had sunk into a heavy swoon, from which it seemed they could never arouse her. A different suggestion was made by every one present; voices of women and men blended in calling down imprecations upon the head of the cruel father.

Had that scene occurred in the halls of fashion in the Knickerbocker world, there would have been a stampede of horrified women. They would have tumbled over each other in their efforts to reach the street, anxious that no one should know of their presence beneath that roof, and would have told you on the following day that they had never known the person to whom it had occurred. But not so in the homes of Bohemia.

There was no one present who was not more than anxious to do all that lay in their power for the unhappy girl, and Chetwynd was finally forced to wave them back from their kindly interference.

"I am sure she would be better if you would only go!" he exclaimed in an inhospitable way that nobody misunderstood. "If you will remain, Mag, and get

the others out of the house as quickly as possible, she will come around all right."

And then the men rallied to Chetwynd's assistance, getting the women from the house as quickly as was possible.

Philip Sumner knelt for a moment beside the unconscious form, and with ghastly lips and haggard face said in an undertone to Chetwynd:

"At least you will let me remain!"

Chetwynd placed a hand upon his shoulder not unkindly.

"Better not," he said, quietly.

"But—"

"I know! I know!" the dancing-master interrupted. "But it is neither just to yourself nor to her."

"There is no justice in the world," answered Phil, sullenly, rising to his feet. "Her life, her happiness is more than all the world to me."

"You do not want to make those cruel words her father spoke true. You are the betrothed husband of another woman. And the whole world knows it."

Phil's head was bowed. There was crimson shame in his countenance. He did not reply directly, but said huskily as he reached the door:

"I shall send a doctor. For God's sake, let me know if anything should—should happen, will you, Chetwynd?"

"Yes," answered the elder man.

"You will remain with Mag?"

"Yes."

"Then if I send a messenger, you will let me know how she is?"

"Yes."

had been compelled to hire a conveyance and drive to another town. And now to know that *his* daughter—his Lillian—was like that girl! God!

He was wandering about the streets, regardless of direction, suffering blindly, determining that he would close his heart, as well as his life, to her who had proven herself so unworthy, when he was accosted by a man in uniform.

"Look here, pardner, do you know where you're goin'?"

Jonathan Esmonde looked up in a dazed sort of way. For a moment he did not reply; then he stammered, half incoherently:

"I ain't a a-goin' nowhere."

"Well, this is about the sixth time you've walked around this block, and it don't look right."

"Who be you?" inquired the old countryman, tremulously.

"I'm an officer of the police," answered the man, pompously. "The first thing you know a crook will scent you out as a hayseed, and you'll be a long time finding out anything else."

"I—I don't think I—understand you."

"Ever been in New York before?"

"No."

"Got any friends here?"

"No."

"Then you'd better attend to whatever business brought you, and git home by the fastest lightning, express. The me-tropolis ain't no hay-mow, an' you ain't safe. Take my advice an' go to whatever hotel you're a-stopping at, or I'll have to run you in, an'

it wouldn't sound well to the folks where you live to hear you'd slept in jail all night."

Old Jonathan started.

"In jail!" he moaned.

"Yes, siree; in the lock-up. A less kind-hearted officer than I am would a-done it before—arrested you as a vagabond; but you looked kinder knocked up, somehow. Do you know where you air a-stoppin'?"

"I ain't a-stoppin' nowhere," stammered the old man. "I come to this awful place after my daughter."

"Your daughter? Where is she?"

Old Jonathan hesitated a moment; then fixing his eyes on the officer half pleadingly, he said:

"In the New York Hospital. Can you tell me where it is?"

"The New York Hospital? Why, you can't go there to-night. It's too late, or, rather, too early. I'll tell you what; you come with me. I'll take you to a place where you can stay all night, and you git a cab and drive there in the morning."

The kind-hearted officer linked his arm in that of the old man and led him away to a small but respectable hotel.

"Give the old duffer a room," he said to the clerk. "He's kinder off in the upper register, I reckon. I found him wanderin' about the streets, and brought him here instead of runnin' him in."

But Jonathan Esmonde did not sleep that night. All night he sat by the window of his little room, thinking vaguely. It seemed to him that his life lay along the edge of a precipice down which he dared not look. A grim memory of his wife came to him, and of Amy. When he got out of his chair, long after the warm

morning sun was streaming into the window, he remembered the policeman's words, and going downstairs, he paid his bill and ordered a cab.

He had not eaten. It seemed to him that a morsel of food would have choked him, and yet he was so faint from his long fast that he could scarcely stand. He drove at once to the New York Hospital.

He asked for Amy Esmonde, and was taken to her room when he gave the information that he was her father.

She looked up in almost irrepressible surprise as he stood before her. There was no smile upon his grim, cold, gray face; but he went up to her quietly, and laid his hand upon her head.

"What is it?" she gasped. "Is mother—ill?"

"No," he answered, hoarsely. "I have come to take you home—that is all."

"Home!" she cried, starting up and looking at him out of wide, frightened eyes. "Why, what do you mean?"

"There ain't nothin' hard to understand about that," he returned, grimly. "I have come to take you home."

"You can't mean it!" she cried, heavily. "You can't mean it! Why, the doctors tell me there is a chance for my recovery! They tell me that I may walk again. Why should I go home? Where is Lillian?"

The old man's face darkened.

"Never mention that name to me again!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "I have no daughter now but you. I trusted her, an' she has deceived me. She has disgraced the old mother that worked and slaved all her life that your sister might be spared. Never speak

that name to me again? It was all this hateful city that done it. She was a good girl until she came here."

"And she is a good girl now!" cried Amy passionately. "She has never disgraced any one, and I would not believe an angel from heaven that spoke ill of her! What has she done?"

For a moment Jonathan Esmonde hesitated; then, seeing something of the womanhood that would not be denied in the small, uplifted face, he bent toward Amy, and his voice was nothing more than a whisper as he said:

"I saw her last night covered with the diamonds that wus bought with shame. She don't teach school, as she made us poor fools believe, but lives in a golden palace that the devil finds fur them that serve him. She ain't fit to speak the name uv a decent person, and hers must never leave your lips ag'in!"

"I won't believe it!" exclaimed the girl, desperately. Jonathan Esmonds raised himself and crossed his hands upon his bosom.

"Your father has never spoken a lie in his life," he answered, stonily. "I tell you that I *saw*!—I saw her surrounded with her infamy, I saw her clothed as it would become only the lowest of the low to be dressed. There must be no question between you an' me. I saw and spoke to her—fur the last time in this life. An' now you must come wi' me."

"And leave the only hope of my life behind?" cried Amy, passionately. "Go when those who know tell me that I may be cured? Go back to the old, hateful life of suffering and toil and humiliation? Go back to the hopelessness of hell? I can't! I can't! You could never demand it of me!"

The old man leaned forward once more. This time he placed his hand upon her shoulder with a heaviness that hurt her.

"You *will* come!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "You air my child; you air not uv my age. Do ye think I'll abandon ye to these wolves that have eaten all the purity from her soul? Do ye think I'll leave ye to become the thing she is? Shall I go back to the poor old mother a childless man? You'll go, if I must take ye in my arms an' carry ye every step uv the way! You'll go, if I have to take you—dead!"

He looked down into the white, despairing face; but even after he had looked, and understood, too, in his own way, there was no relenting in his own. He turned away, mumbling as he did so:

"I'd rather have ye as ye are, the poor, lame, halting thing, than the beauty I wus proud uv in her! It is the punishment uv my pride, I reckon—the punishment fur my pride!"

Amy did not speak. The stony despair never changed when she heard the doctors of the hospital urging her father to allow her to remain, because she knew what his answer would be. And they looked into her face as she left the hospital with the cold, grim man, with the expression of death upon her, feeling that he alone would be answerable for her life.

"The hard, cruel old fool will regret it," one of the doctors said, as the cab drove away. "She will either die or go mad. I never saw such a look in any eyes in my life. Poor child—poor little child! And there was a chance for her, too! There would always have been a deformity, but nothing to what it is now. Upon

my soul, there should be a law compelling fathers like that to give up their children!"

CHAPTER XXV.

The opening for August twenty-sixth had been postponed because of the illness of the star attraction: for Lil lay for weeks at the very door of death, weeks during which she was as tenderly watched and guarded by Chetwynd as if he had been her mother instead of simply a well-liked friend.

There was a nurse for the night and a nurse for the day; but there never seemed an hour of either time that Chetwynd was not conscious of all that was occurring in the sick-room. He slept, if he slept at all, upon a couch drawn up before the door that led from her *boudoir* to the dancing-room, and there was never a moment when he was not within the sound of her voice.

He listened to her ravings of mother and home until he could bear it no longer; and one day, in desperation, he sat down and wrote her father of her dangerous illness, begging him, in the name of Christian charity to come to the suffering one; or, if he could not do so himself, to send the mother of the unfortunate girl. But the letter was returned to him, with a line at the bottom in Jonathan Esmonde's cold, stiff chirography, stating:

"I have no wish to hear again from the woman who is no longer my daughter, unless it is to inform me of her death.

JONATHAN ESMONDE."

And Chetwynd had burned that, lest at some time, upon her recovery, Lil might discover the cruel thing.

But there was another besides Chetwynd who haunted the premises of the Belleami apartments. It was Philip Sumner. And between the two men a friendship had sprung up that was really remarkable between men who love the same woman. In spite of the fact that Chetwynd knew of Lil's preference, there was never a twinge of jealousy in his feeling toward Philip. On the contrary, it seemed to draw the young man closer to him; and the old dancing-master's devotion to Lil won a regard from Philip such as he had felt toward few men in the course of his life.

Tacitly he had professed his love for Lil to Chetwynd in a thousand ways; but not one word had been uttered upon the subject that would be an insult to Lil or to his betrothed wife.

For this illness of Lil had made a different man of Phil. He was again the pure-hearted, honest man that he had been in those first days of their acquaintance, and from which he had never wandered but once. It had saved him; for while he could not control his heart, while he could not force himself to love where love was unwilling, he had resolved to do his duty. He told himself that as soon as Lil was beyond danger of death, he would return to the side of the woman to whom duty bound him, and that he would never voluntarily see Lil again.

He had learned to know her as she really was in those days, from Chetwynd, her constant companion, who believed that not an angel in heaven was purer than she; and Phil, knowing her love for him, deter-

mined that he would attempt to place no temptation in her way.

He loved to think of her as pure. He wanted her to remain a sweet and tender memory to him, surrounded with the halo of chastity. He blushed as he remembered the thoughts that had disgraced his manhood, upon the evening that his mother had told him of the error of his father, and what had followed it.

He would see Lil but once after her recovery, he told himself, and then only to most humbly beg her pardon for the wrong that he had done her in thought.

That was the plan that he had laid out for himself; but courage is so much stronger when temptation is in the dim perspective.

Lil was convalescing.

From the first moment of the return of reason she had never spoken her mother's name, never made a reference to those old days that she had loved to talk of to Chetwynd. She seemed so changed that his tender heart ached as he looked at her. She was so white, so silent, so listless. She would sit in the chair beside the window where the nurse placed her and look out into the street, apparently without the movement of a muscle, her great dark eyes larger and darker than ever, her lovely color all vanished, and yet more beautiful, more spirituelle, than she had ever been before, with the short, clustering curls of auburn hair lying in fascinating disorder about her white brow.

When a message came, or fruit or flowers, from any admirer, she would turn her head and smile faintly; but there was no other recognition of the efforts that

were made in her behalf, not a word of the future, not an inquiry concerning any friend, not a syllable concerning the past—nothing but silence.

After a time Chetwynd grew alarmed. He spoke to the doctor on the subject, and the medical man looked concerned.

"She needs something to arouse her," he said with decision. "It is only to her superb constitution that we owe her life. It does not seem to me that she is trying to get well. I really think she is disappointed that she has pulled through. If we could only invent something to drag her out of this lethargy, it might save her."

It was that same evening, when Philip Sumner called, that Chetwynd repeated the conversation to him.

"Do you know, Sumner," he said, earnestly, when he had finished the doctor's words, "I have thought of everything possible, and there seems but one way."

"What is that?"

"*You* must go to her."

"I?"

"Yes. Pardon me, but this is no time for concealments, old fellow. I know your secret as well as you probably know mine. There is no need that we should speak to each other upon a subject that can only bring pain and embarrassment to both of us; but I believe that it would do her good if you were to see her. She would refuse if you were to ask permission to call, but you must go in without permission. I will arrange it if you agree."

"Agree? I would give my life for her if it would save her suffering! But—I am bound by something

stronger than a mere promise, stronger than a mere betrothal. I can trust you, Chetwynd. You have guessed right in supposing that I love her. I have been a scoundrel in the past, but it was misery that made me so, and I see it all clearly enough now, to want to be a man again. I tell you that I am bound by a secret that I cannot betray, but that is stronger than life or death. Now I will leave it to you to decide; is it for the better or worse that I should see her?"

He was white to the lips. Chetwynd saw readily enough in which direction inclination lay. He knew that Philip Sumner was breathless with suspense, with hope of seeing her; but it was not of the man that Chetwynd thought; it was of Lil.

He hesitated for a long time, but turned and put out his hand to Phil at last.

"We must trust to God for the future," he said, hoarsely, "and take advantage of the only opportunity that the present offers. Go to her. I trust to your discretion to do what is best; but remember that her life or reason depends upon you. When strength is restored, then will be time to think of the future."

And so poor Philip's resolutions were set at naught.

She was sitting beside the window, in the old listless way, upon the first occasion that Philip saw her after the terrible illness. No one had announced him, and he had time to observe her before he went forward. He noted the little folded hands, almost transparent, with the pretty blue veins marking their white surface; the colorless face shadowed by great, dark-circled eyes; the lovely short, curling hair, so different from the heavy masses of the old days. She was like

a small, suffering child now, and his heart ached as he observed the pathetic droop of the mouth, the utter weariness and silent dejection of the attitude.

A sigh that was almost a sob escaped him, and she heard it in the dense stillness of the room.

She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. The faintest shadow of a ghastly smile played about her lips.

"Poor old Chet!" she said, faintly. "I wonder if ever a father was so devoted to his sick baby as you are to me?"

Philip Sumner could have cried out. The voice was even more changed than her personal appearance. It was so tired, so utterly tired!

It seemed to him almost as if he were in the presence of the dead.

He walked lightly toward her, so lightly that even in that stillness she did not hear him nor know of his approach, until she felt an arm steal about her waist, and heard a voice whisper in her ear:

"Lil! my pure white lily! my darling!"

There were suppressed tears in the voice—that voice which she loved so well.

She opened her eyes and looked down upon him, not startled, but—happy. Then she let her hand, light as a snow-flake, rest upon his head.

"I believe if I were dead,

And you upon my lifeless heart should tread,

Not knowing what the poor clod chanced to be,

It would find sudden thrill beneath the touch

Of him it ever loved in life so much,

And throb again, warm, tender, true to thee!"

She did not repeat the words, but some such thought

gently rippled through her soul and reached him in the smile upon her lips.

Under the light of God's eye, called love, he lifted himself and kissed her upon the lips—he, the betrothed husband of another; and yet it was as stainless as an altar-cloth, as pure as a child's dream of heaven.

It was the benediction of love, the triumph of chastity, and yet turned to pollution in the hands of the arch-fiend, the incarnate devil.

For Kirk Maitland saw!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A handsome man with shadowed blue eyes and silvery hair leaned against the casement of the window, looking from the Manhattan Club into Fifth Avenue. He seemed to be unconscious of either surroundings or occupation, but gnawed his mustache in deep thought, starting violently as a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"I've spoken your name three distinct times, Mr. Sumner!" a laughing voice exclaimed. "Is the attraction upon the avenue unusual to-day?"

"I beg your pardon, Maitland; I didn't hear you. Is it anything special?"

"Only that the boys want you for a fourth at whist if you feel inclined."

"Excuse me to-day, won't you? I don't feel up to the mental exertion. Between the humidity and heat I am completely knocked out."

"It's rather a relief to me, to tell you the truth."

said Maitland, languidly. "I only consented at the earnest solicitation of some of the fellows, and am glad we can't find a fourth. Beastly weather, isn't it?"

"Yes, and no promise of a change."

"I wonder you stay in the city," exclaimed Maitland, sympathetically. "Cool weather can always be found if a man will only go around the world in search of it."

"But what will his business be when he returns, when times are in their present state? I tell you these are times that rack men's souls as well as intellectual capabilities. Everybody is failing. The amount of gold being shipped out of the country is ruinous. If the Silver law is not repealed within a fortnight, God help the country; and I haven't much faith myself that even that will bring any very material change. These are days when a fellow must brace up and face the thermometer as well as the financial crisis."

"I hope your house is in no danger."

"No more than the rest; but the whole country is in danger. Who would have thought of the Mitchell Bank of Milwaukee going under? The Baring Brother's was no greater surprise. But it isn't the banks alone; it is everything. All the mercantile businesses are in the balance and nothing promises to hold its own. Men have got into a panic and are locking up their money in safe-deposit vaults instead of coming to the rescue of their country. There is no class that will escape."

"Ah! you are a pessimist. I grant you it is bad; but as soon as the Silver law is repealed we shall have good times again. You have devoted yourself too much to business this summer, ~~and~~ need change.

"Why don't you go down and bear the market for a time as an excitement; or, better still, get out of it altogether for a while? I am going to advise Phil to take you out of town for a month."

Halford Sumner's eyes darkened. He glanced away from Maitland toward the street again before replying. "I have scarcely seen Phil for a month past. Fact is, I have not had an opportunity to congratulate him since the announcement of his engagement. He breakfasts in his room, either before or after I go in the morning, and is never at home to dinner."

"Then you have not seen him?"

"Only at the office in presence of the clerks, and not much even of that."

"Ah! then you *have* seen him."

"Why? Is there anything special?"

"No; only it seems to me that Phil is not looking as well as usual. He is pale, rather distraught, and while saying a word for you in my advice about going abroad I was also saying one for Phil. I really think he needs change of air."

"He will undoubtedly take it on his honey-moon?"

"I had forgotten that; one necessarily does in thinking of Phil."

Halford Sumner looked at him sharply.

"I don't see the connection!" he exclaimed rather curtly. "Why should not Phil marry?"

"He should. I really think it will be the best thing that could happen to him."

"I don't think I quite follow you."

For a moment there was silence between the two men. Maitland stood there staring out of the window as if he were thinking deeply, pulling at his mustache.

almost fiercely, then turned again to Mr. Sumner suddenly.

"I wish," he said in a husky-sort of tone, "that I dared say something to you without fear of misconception, Mr. Sumner."

The banker looked at him sharply.

"You may," he said, laconically.

Again Maitland hesitated, but only momentarily, then continued, swiftly:

"I don't pledge you to any secrecy in what I shall tell you; but I wish, before speaking my name in connection with it, that you would remember that Phil and I have been friends since our boyhood, and that it would be most painful to me to have anything interrupt that friendship. I know that he would resent my telling you as the most unwarranted interference on my part; but, upon my soul, it is the only hope I see of saving him."

"Go on. I confess you alarm me; but you may trust me."

"A man's own family, you know, Mr. Sumner, is the last on earth to hear detrimental rumors concerning him."

"And there are such concerning Phil?"

"In one way. His marriage has been announced, yet his attentions to—well, to another lady are causing the most unpleasant rumors—rumors which I am sure would be most distasteful to Miss Langford should they come to her ears, as they most certainly will if something is not done to check Phil."

"I can scarcely credit what you tell me. Is there any foundation for these rumors?"

"I regret to say there is."

"May I ask who the young lady is to whom he is devoting himself?"

"I had rather not answer, if you will excuse me."

"But I must entreat of you to do so. If you refuse, I shall only be forced to seek my information elsewhere, a thing which in itself might cause increased comment."

"Then, sir, I beg that you will understand that I do it only for Phil's own sake. The young woman is a very beautiful girl whose name is upon the tongue of half the men in New York—a charming girl to whom many are devoted; but one does not expect such open adulation paid to another girl from a man so recently betrothed."

"You have still not told me her name."

"She is a Miss Lillian Esmonde."

"Lillian Esmonde—Lillian Esmonde? Have I not heard the name before? Is she an actress?"

"You very likely saw an article in the papers not long ago, a sensational affair about an old countryman who came to New York in search of his daughter, and found her dancing for her living. He went to her house, cursed her for the life she was leading, forbid her ever seeing her mother or sister again, and left her in a most dramatic way, fainting. She was taken with brain fever, and is only just recovering."

"And she is—"

"Lillian Esmonde—Lil, the dancing-girl."

"And Phil is attentive to *that* girl?"

"Not only attentive, devoted. He alone of all her admirers has been admitted to her chamber during her convalescence; and I assure you, sir, that I do not exaggerate when I tell you that he has haunted the

house during her illness, so much that several comments have been made in the papers without the mention of names."

"I can scarcely credit it."

"And yet it is true. I give you my word that I saw him myself yesterday with his arms about the young woman's waist, kissing her."

"You? Then she is a friend of yours?"

"*Pourquoi pas?*" asked Maitland, shrugging his shoulders indifferently. "An unengaged bachelor's friends are not always those that a married man should choose. Lil is a nice girl, a charming girl, and I should be the last one to find fault if Phil were free. On the contrary, I should think he could find no more beautiful wife than Lil—"

"A dancing-girl!" interrupted Halford Sumner, scornfully.

"Even though she is a dancing-girl," asserted Maitland, positively. "But Phil is not free. His betrothal is announced, and his attentions to Lil are not only compromising his honor but her reputation. It is just neither to one nor to the other."

"I see. I appreciate what you have said, Maitland—from my soul I do. Don't think that I shall betray you in any way to Phil. On the contrary, if, as you say, these rumors are public gossip, then there is no reason why he should not think that I have heard them from more than one. I appreciate the friendship that has made you risk so much in telling me those things, as it might have been most unpleasant if such chatter had reached Miss Langford. Phil must be made to see the folly of his course at once."

"I hope you may succeed."

"I must succeed."

"It is a strong attachment and will require careful handling."

"I shall take good care of that. Thank you again, and good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

The two men shook hands, and Halford Sumner left the club. He felt that he could not face his friends that evening, and in spite of the fact that he knew he should not find his wife at home, he went there and sat down in the darkness before the window.

"Who would ever have thought that Phil, of all boys in the world, should ever cause me trouble like this?" he mused, looking with pained eyes out into the lighted street. "But, thank God, the little mother does not know. It would kill her. I have been able to keep it from her. I am afraid she has not thought so well of me as she might, but I had rather it had been me than Phil, her boy, her idol. Hark! Isn't that his footstep?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Phil!"

"Yes, father."

"Will you come in here for a moment?"

The voice, not quite in its usual tone, and coming as it did from a dark room, was rather startling for a moment, but Phil recovered himself at once. He hesitated, then with a gesture of deprecation he threw his hat aside and entered the room where his father

still sat beside the window. He could not quite control the expression of repulsion that shadowed his countenance, but the room was so dark that expressions did not matter much.

"Where is mother?" he asked, quietly.

"Spending the evening with your aunt Fulda. I am to call for her at eleven."

"And you are spending the time until that hour in a darkened room? Isn't that rather unlike you, and more on the order of a sentimental girl?"

There was an effort at lightness in the tone, but it was not particularly successful. Mr. Sumner, Sr. moved uneasily in his chair.

"It is unusual," he said, after a little pause; "but I am in rather an unusual humor this evening. I haven't had an opportunity to congratulate you upon your engagement, Phil, and your marriage is less than a month off. But you know that I wish you every happiness, my boy."

The young man drew himself up stiffly.

"Thank you," he said, icily. "If will excuse me now, father, I think—"

"Unless it is something very important, I wish you would stay," Mr. Sumner interrupted. "There are several things that I want to say to you, and I can find no better time than the present. I want to ask you something about your plans for the future and about your financial condition. And there are other things, also. Where are you going upon your bridal tour?"

"It is a subject that I have given no consideration whatever!" exclaimed Philip, haughtily.

Mr. Sumner looked in surprise in his son's direction.

"That is a peculiar statement for a prospective bridegroom to make, is it not?" he demanded, a little curiously. "Usually such arrangements are thought out as soon as the lady's consent is obtained."

Phil was leaning uneasily against the corner of the mantle-shelf, looking down in the darkness to which his eyes had grown somewhat accustomed. He flushed angrily and threw a look of withering contempt at the man beside the window, then answered in a tone from which he could not eradicate the savage unrest.

"It might be peculiar coming from a willing bridegroom, but not from one whose marriage is forced upon him!"

"Phil!"

Mr. Sumner arose suddenly and faced his son in the darkness, an angry flush mounting to his brow also.

"The remark you have made would never have left the lips of an honorable man, no matter how unwilling a partner he may be to a transaction where a lady is concerned. I would not have believed it of my son, in spite of the past, in spite of the rumors which I have heard at the club concerning you."

"May I ask to what you refer?"

"To the stories of your infatuation for a dancer, a girl whom the world calls 'Lil,' and with whom your name is intimately associated upon the very eve of your marriage. You are making a common scandal—bringing shame upon yourself and humiliation to the lady who has done you the honor to consent to be your wife. Your devotion to this woman is the talk of the town!"

"If that were true, which I by no means admit, I deny your right to question my conduct!" cried Phil,

crimson with indignation. "The lady to whom you refer is as pure as a saint, and I shall allow no man, not even my father, to speak lightly of her in my presence!"

"And yet you set the tongues of all New York gossiping by your attentions to her, you the betrothed husband of another woman. You deny the right of your father to question your conduct, and yet you are setting yourself up as a target, inviting the darts of every scandal-monger in the city. Are you lost to all sense of honor that you can speak like that?"

"The word 'honor' comes with a bad grace from *your* lips," sneered Phil, forgetting himself under the lash of his anger.

Mr. Sumner looked at him for a moment in silence, then:

"What do you mean?" he demanded, very quietly.

"I mean that I have yielded the sacrifice you demanded of me, and that I shall marry the woman whom you chose, not I. But I cannot compel my heart to follow the dictates of your will, even to save you from the position into which your lack of that honor of which you prat has thrown you."

For a moment the man stood dazed and dumb under his son's words, then with a calm deliberation he took out his match-safe, struck a match and lighted the gas. Then he turned and looked Phil full in the face.

"I wanted to see what manner of man you have become that you dare utter such words to me," he said, with well-fitting dignity. "I confess that I did demand that you ask Miss Langford to become your wife, and the relief I felt when I knew that she had consented. I was even sorry for you when you gave me no op-

unity to speak to you upon the subject, and did not force it upon you, respecting your embarrassment. Even after hearing the stories that are afloat concerning your attentions to this dancing-girl, I would have spared you, but you put it beyond my power. I called you in here hoping to find you repentant, determining that I would help you in the future, regretting, as I have regretted ever since its occurrence, that I refused the demand for money that you made upon me to pay your gambling debts, and determining that I would make you an allowance in future that would place you beyond temptation. And you receive my advice, reward my good intentions by insult. You—”

“Stop!” cried Phil, throwing up his head and compelling silence by the commanding tone of his voice. “What are those falsehoods that you are uttering? My gambling debts! To what are you referring?”

“To the ten thousand dollars for which you asked me in your letter telling me of your folly, and promising to reform in the event of my never mentioning the subject in your hearing. Well, I did let you have the money, because I thought it would be a lesson to you for the future, as I told you in my letter, but I have never mentioned the subject to you because you have avoided me, never entering my presence except when your mother was by, or some one was in the office. And then—”

“Wait! Let us understand this much before you go on. I never sent you any such letter in my life. I never played a game of cards at which I lost more than a hundred at a sitting in my life, and certainly never more than five hundred altogether in my life. There is no man who is a more moderate card-player than I,

no man who cares less for the game; and I have never asked you for a cent over the allowance made me. On the contrary, I have been most successful in Wall Street, and had about concluded to ask for the discontinuance of the allowance altogether."

The two men stood there staring at each other, the one in haughty, insulted pride, the other half in unbelief, for some moments before either spoke; then Mr. Sumner, Sr., passed his hand across his forehead in bewilderment.

"I wish that what you say were true," he said at last; "but I have the letter in your own writing in my private safe at the office."

For the first time a puzzled expression crossed Phil's face.

"If that is true, I denounce it as a forgery!" he exclaimed, hotly.

Mr. Sumner started, then made a gesture of deprecation as he turned away.

"I half believed you for a moment until I remembered what followed," he said, wearily. "There is no use to add a lie to your sin, Phil."

He would have walked away, but the young man caught him by the arm almost fiercely.

"I demand to know what you mean!" he cried. "You have not the right to refuse to speak! I swear that I never asked you for such a loan, such a gift in my life. Even if I had needed it, my mother's fortune has been at my disposal any time that I might require it."

Again Mr. Sumner faced him, this time looking eagerly into the handsome, manly face of his son. There was not a shadow of falsehood in the frank,

open eyes, and a breathless sort of hope seemed to steal over the elder man.

"Then answer this—by your mother's love—did you, or did you not, forge the name of Arnold Langford to a check for ten thousand dollars?"

"Good God, no!"

The voice was one of thunder. The old man reeled. He put out his hand and caught his son's arm for support. His face was ghastly in its pallor, and yet his eyes were blazing with the light of hope.

"Swear it!" he cried, hoarsely. "Swear it!"

"I swear by almighty Heaven! by my hope of salvation!" cried Phil, with thrilling earnestness. "Who has accused me of so foul a crime? There seems to have been some sort of treachery at work here, and you and I have been too long silent. It is now time that both should speak, and that we understand each other at last!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"It seems so good to be permitted to see you once more, Lil! Are you feeling quite yourself again?"

Kirk Maitland had gone direct from the club and his interview with Halford Summer to the residence of the woman whom he had tried to injure, and to his surprise was admitted to her presence. He had been as devoted, during her illness and convalescence, in his inquiries as had Philip himself; but while he had witnessed the tableau of the evening before, seeing Phil with his arm about the woman whom Maitland

loved, their lips meeting, he had not been permitted to enter.

But Lil was looking more like a return to health than she had yet done when he was shown in, and there was even something of the old coquetry in the smile that greeted his words.

"Not so good as that," she answered, extending her hand cordially in lieu of rising, a formality not demanded of convalescents; "but infinitely better than I have been doing. I shall be out of this in another week."

"Thank Heaven for that; It has been an anxious time, I can tell you, for all of us. What a pleasure it must be to a woman to feel her power, as you must! Why, half the fellows in New York have looked as if they were in mourning. Great Scott! what a rousing reception you will get when you go back to the stage!"

An expression of shame and shrinking darkened the beautiful face. She did not reply at once to Maitland, but when she did she said, slowly:

"I doubt if I shall ever go back."

"Why?" he asked, curiously.

"Oh," with a gesture of deprecation, "I loathe it so!"

"Ah! you think you do; but life would be no life to you now without it. I have heard stage folk make such resolutions before, but they always break them. You'll go back, and you'll find yourself a greater favorite than ever before."

"I don't think so. It seems to me now that the sight of a theater would sicken me. I shall never return to the old ways again."

She was looking out into the brilliantly lighted

street, her perfect profile turned toward him. He wondered if Philip Sumner and the tableau he remembered of the evening before had anything to do with that resolution, and a flush of anger came to his cheeks. He controlled it well, however, and said, lightly:

"Don't talk like that. You make me feel positively lachrymose. When you are well and strong again you will think differently. Do you know what I think would be the greatest possible benefit to you?"

"What?"

"A year abroad. It would take you away from unpleasant memories, get the morbidness out of you, and do you more good than all the doctors' stuffs in the country. Why don't you try it, Lil?"

There was weariness, almost despair in the eyes that were lifted to his.

"I can't," she answered, pathetically. "There is the living to earn. It won't be so easy now that I mean to abandon—the past."

"Fiddlesticks! My dear girl you were never cut out for that sort of thing, and there isn't a fellow in the city that would allow it. Fancy your doing anything except dancing! Fancy your being anything except the goddess we all adore! You've been a queen too long to ever be a slave. The first thing a fellow asks when he enters the club now is, 'Has anybody heard how Lil is to-day?' and a score of voices cry, 'Yes.' They've all been to inquire, you know. They talked of putting up regular bulletins."

Lil laughed slightly, then said, restlessly:

"Talk to me of something besides myself. I am sick to death of the subject. I want a breath of fresh

air from the outside. Tell me all the latest gossip. Who is dead? Who is married. What man has run away with his friend's wife? And what woman has been selling her birthright for a mess of pottage? Tell me something."

Maitland threw himself back in his chair and laughed softly.

"There, that is like you," he said, nodding his head gently. "By Jove, Lil, you are prettier than ever! There I go again! I beg your pardon; but you are really the only subject that is interesting to me. Let me see. Did you hear about Dick Neville? Got thrown out of his carriage the other day and was carried home unconscious. His wife went through his pockets, by design or accident. Any way you fix it, it was unlucky for poor Dick. She found a letter from a woman with whom he was going to keep an appointment. It has caused no end of a row and a threatened divorce suit."

"Served him right! Married men have no business having engagements with other women. I hope she'll win the suit!"

"Bloodthirsty little savage! Then there was Sam Ewing. He was driving up the boulevard the other day with Nathalia Vinita, and who should he meet face to face but his own wife driving down the boulevard with Edward Ferrando. There promises to be something interesting grow out of that too. Have you seen Phil lately?"

"Philip Sumner?"

"Yes."

"He was here last night."

"Oh! Then of course he told you about his enam-
orita."

"No, I don't think so. What about her?"

He saw her eagerness but too clearly; but there was only the utmost nonchalance in his voice and manner as he continued:

"Oh, only about the grand blow that is being made about the wedding. It is to be at Grace Church, you know, with no end of swelldom present. It promises to be the greatest spread that New York has seen in many moons. There are to be twelve attendants for the bride, full choral service and all that. Phil's present to her is to be a tiara that is said to have cost close to two hundred thousand. You know the wedding is barely three weeks off now. I met him in front of a jeweler's to-day, and he asked me to go in and help him select some scarf-pins for the ushers. They are really stunning. I tell you, in spite of his coolness about it, the young man feels his luck keenly, and is about as proud of having won one of the greatest heiresses in New York as any fellow you ever saw. They are to go abroad for a year."

He had watched the sweet face grow whiter and whiter as he talked, watched the lovely eyes droop, watched the clinching of the small, thin hands, the valiant struggle she was making to maintain her self-control, but it did not stop the flow of the heartless words. He went on relentlessly until he had finished, then paused to see the full effect of the blow he had delivered.

She felt that she must make some remark, and while her heart was quivering under the agonizing sting of his lash, she forced her stiff lips to say:

"A year. It is a long time."

"It doesn't seem long to lovers," he answered, quietly.

"Are they lovers, or is it merely a family arrangement?"

"You'd think they were lovers if you could see Phil at the florist's the first thing every morning, selecting flowers for her, and sending her a note with them. The fellows at the club call him 'Romeo,' and guy the life out of him. But he takes it good naturedly enough. He's a nice fellow, Phil is, if he would only drop that silly desire for 'mashing.' It's the only weak thing I've ever seen in him. He can never see a pretty face without an insatiable longing to make its owner fall in love with him, and the fact of her being a married woman does not daunt him at all. He just keeps up the siege until she unconditionally surrenders."

"And they go abroad the twenty-fifth of this month, you say?"

A crimson splash had crossed her white cheek like a blood-streak that follows a wound.

"Yes," he answered, indifferently. "And that's just what you ought to do, and pull yourself out of this illness. You ought to go now, by one of the first steamers. Paris would do you a world of good. I say Lil, why not marry me and let me take you?"

She started. She was so weak from her illness, from the terrible mental strain to which she had been subjected, and then he had worked her up to a pitch of excitement that bordered in hysteria. He had done it deliberately, watching his own progress step by step. He saw that she was quivering in every mem-

cle as she leaned a trifle forward. He continued just as quietly as if his heart were not throbbing until he feared she might hear it:

"Do you remember that bluff of yours I called, just before you were taken ill? Don't you remember? The bet you made with Nathalia Vinita? You said you would consent to become my wife at the end of a month if your engagement to another had not been announced. Dear little one, redeem your promise. Let me take care of you. Let me take you out of this where you will forget the past that has—distressed you!"

Forget! She felt at that moment that she would gladly die to bring forgetfulness. Phil had deceived her again. She had lived through his former deception, and she would live through this, but she felt that her heart was broken.

She felt sure that every one present the evening when she had made her foolish bet had understood to whom she referred, and the humiliation stung her to the quick.

After all, what difference could anything make in her life? She was abandoned by those who should have protected her, deserted by the man whom she loved with all the strength of her nature, disgraced by the outside show of the life she had led, not by any sinful act of hers. What hope was there?

An hysterical sound, between a laugh and a heart-breaking cry, arose to her lips.

"You won the bet all right enough, Kirk, and you deserve the payment. They call it a debt of honor, don't they?"

"Yes," he answered, leaning forward eagerly.

"Does that mean that you will be my wife, Lil?"

"Yes, I will be your wife!" she answered, the hysteria growing upon her.

"At once?" he cried, scarcely able to force his voice above a whisper. "At once? Let our wedding take place before that of Philip Sumner and Miss Langford. I ask it only to spare you, dear, to save you the gossip. You understand me, do you not?"

"Yes," she exclaimed, loudly. "Let it take place in two weeks from to-day. Chet—Chet! Where are you, old man? I want you to come here and congratulate me. I am going to be married in two weeks from to-day to Kirk Maitland, and we are going abroad for a year, perhaps for two. Do you hear, old friend? Come and tell me how glad you are!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

Halford Sumner looked into the eyes of his son with a sort of breathless hope that was bewildering. He did not speak at once; but stood there staring, yielding to the convincing influence of the truthful gaze, hoping, dreading, doubting.

Phil's hand still lay upon his arm detainingly, the echo of Phil's earnest voice still lingered in his ears. The fascination of conflicting emotions held him silent for a time, then he hoarsely exclaimed:

"Where did you get that check for ten thousand dollars which you cashed at the bank and which bore the signature of Arnold Langford?"

"I never cashed such a check; I never had such a check in my possession. Are you mad?"

The bewilderment upon Halford Sumner's countenance deepened. He sat down in a chair suddenly and looked up at his son as if his vision had become clouded. His hands lay limp upon the arms of the chair, and there were heavy drops of perspiration about his mouth and brow.

"What are the circumstances to which you refer?" questioned Phil, seeing the earnestness of his father's manner. "Detail the situation to me and the crime of which I am accused. Why is this the first time that I have heard of it? I entreat of you, sir, to be as explicit as possible."

There was another momentary hesitation; then, in a voice that trembled with emotion, Halford Sumner continued:

"It was while you were at Newport, you remember, about three months ago, that I received the letter bearing your name, in your handwriting, detailing to me an account of your heavy losses at poker and other games of chance. I had received an anonymous communication before that, telling me of your wild life; but I paid no attention to it, as I never do to an unsigned letter. Your letter, however, following it, convinced me of the truth of the statements contained in it, and I determined that the best way to teach a young man of your age a lesson was to make him do without the money to satisfy such desires, feeling that if those debts were left unpaid it would prevent your playing again. I wrote to you to that effect, giving you advice which I thought you needed and

adding a few harsh words which I thought you deserved."

"I never received that letter!" exclaimed Phil, grimly.

Mr. Sumner started. It was only another link, and after a moment of thought he continued:

"A little while after that—I don't know just how long; two weeks, perhaps, or three—Arnold Langford examined his balance and found it ten thousand short. He sent for the checks and examined them in my presence, pronouncing one for ten thousand a forgery. We were both naturally very much excited, and at my suggestion the paying teller was summoned. Langford asked him if he remembered the check, and after examining it Murphy said he did quite well. He was then asked if he knew who presented it, and with a promptness that took my breath away he said that Mr. Philip Sumner had done so and that he had paid the money to him."

"The infernal liar!"

"Then you did not present it?"

"I tell you I never saw it!"

"Good God! It can't be possible that Murphy could have done it, and then attempted to fix his crime upon you!"

"It certainly looks that way. But go on. Why was I not summoned and told of this? Why was I not given an opportunity to defend myself?"

Mr. Sumner hung his head before replying.

"Your letter convinced me of your guilt!" exclaimed the old man, hoarsely. "There was scarcely a doubt left in my mind. Remember, the amounts were identical. The circumstantial evidence was complete.

Langford himself had seen you draw a check that day—a check which you did not present in the usual way—and had observed your agitation. Well—I don't know that I ought to tell you what followed."

"In justice to me I demand it."

"I suppose you are right. I confess to you that I was utterly prostrated by the blow that had been delivered to me, and it was Langford himself who came to my relief. Of course I expected nothing but that publicity, disgrace, perhaps even Sing Sing, would follow, and it seemed to me that the evidence was as complete as it could be made. Langford called me into his private office, where I offered to make the amount good to him; but this he most emphatically declined. Then he told me he had a proposition to make to me. You have never heard the story, Phil, and I hesitate to tell it to you now, though it seems that common justice demands that I should withhold nothing. Well, my son, Olive was born before the laws of the Church and the land had united Arnold Langford and the woman who afterward became his wife."

"Good heavens!"

"It is a secret which he has been enabled to preserve to the present time; but the wild fear haunts Arnold Langford every hour of his life that the disgrace to her will become known to the world. It has been his haunting desire to secure a good marriage for her, so that if the blow should fall, it would come with less deadly effect. The proposition that he made to me was that he would conceal your crime from the world if you would consent to make that daughter your wife. I agreed to do what I could to bring about

an adjustment of the affair, but one of the conditions he imposed upon me was that no mention should be made to you of the forgery. Not one syllable was to be uttered concerning it. He felt that it would lower his daughter in your estimation, and there would be less chance for her future happiness if it were known to you that your freedom was bought with this marriage. He argued that if it were supposed by you that your crime had not been discovered, your honor would keep you faithful to the daughter of the man you had wronged, and might make an honest man of you in future. It seemed a marvelous thing to me that he would wish his daughter to wed with a forger; but he argued that the temptation had been acted upon under impulse, and that he did not believe the crime would ever be repeated. He urged that the social position you occupy would save Olive in the event of the shame upon her birth becoming known; and it is needless to say that I yielded readily to the plan he proposed. But you had never been particularly demonstrative in your attentions to the young lady, and apparently you were growing colder. At last Arnold Langford insisted that something must be done. In a quiet way he made it known to me that unless the terms of our agreement were carried out, he would prosecute you as the law allowed."

"And then you went to my mother?" questioned Phil, eagerly.

"Then I went to your mother," assented Mr. Sumner.

"But you did not tell her of this suspicion against me?"

"Good heavens, no! Do you think I would willfully have broken her heart?"

"But what was it you told her, sir?"

"I told her that circumstances at the bank made it absolutely necessary that you should marry Olive Langford. That an unhappy condition of affairs surrounded me, from which I could not extricate myself without the assistance of Arnold Langford, and that he gave that assistance conditional only upon your agreement to marry his daughter. She would not yield at first, would agree to make no attempt to force your inclination, until I told her that the most serious consequences would be involved if she refused. I told her that it was the matter of our family honor that was at stake, and that refusal would involve utter ruin!"

"And you let her think that ruin would come to *you* and not to me?"

"Yes. I know that my wife could not be made to doubt *my* honor any more than I could be made to doubt hers."

There was pride, confidence, devotion, in the tone, and Phil flushed crimson under memory of what had been said.

"And yet you doubted me, sir!" he exclaimed, half reproachfully, half humbly. "You gave me no opportunity for self-defense, and yet to my knowledge, I never in all my life have done that which could cause you pain. But, sir, we have each something for which to ask the other's pardon. You have looked upon me as a forger and I looked upon you as an embezzler!"

"Phil!"

"It is quite true, sir. When I asked Olive Langford to be my wife, I did it under the impression that I was saving you from Sing Sing."

"Good God!"

"You see what it is to be condemned without a chance to refute the charges of crime brought against you: but I had the word of my mother!"

"And she believed—"

Halford Sumner could not complete his sentence. He fell back in his chair ghastly, suffering intensely, and at the same moment a light footstep crossed the hall and entered the room.

"Halford! Phil, are you here? I heard your voices as I came in. What has happened? Why did you not come to bring me home, Halford? I had to ask Fulda's maid to come with me. You are always so prompt that I became alarmed."

An embarrassed silence fell upon the two men, but Phil went forward almost at once and placed his arm about the dainty little creature whom he called mother. He observed how thin and white she had become in those weeks, and the strained, haggard expression about the sightless eyes. He bent down and kissed her tenderly.

"You will forgive him for not coming, dearest, when you know what detained him. I am afraid we both forgot the time. We have been accusing each other of grave offense in our own minds, little one—my father and I—and have but just discovered that both are innocent of the charges. What my father told you of the trouble at the bank, dear, he told to cover from you a crime which he thought I had committed. He was as innocent of wrong as yourself, thank God! You

misunderstood the words he spoke to you. He was excited, perhaps, and said more than he meant to, but I wish you would tell us both where you got hold of that awful word—embezzler!”

The blind eyes were fixed upon Phil in wild entreaty and hope. The white lips were parted. She seemed for the moment not to have heard the latter part of his sentence.

“Innocent!” she whispered. “Innocent! Oh, God, Phil! Innocent, and I—his wife—accused him! Halford, where are you? Oh, Halford, can you ever—”

He did not give her an opportunity to speak the word “forgive.”

He took her in his arms and kissed her with the devotion that had characterized every act of his life toward her. It was a protecting worship that was now as it had always been, beautiful in its transcendent tenderness.

“But we have all doubted,” he said, with deep contrition. “But, thank heaven, it is removed at last!”

There was a moment of emotional silence, then Phil spoke again.

“But tell me, dear,” he cried, “has any one besides my father spoken to you on this subject?”

“No,” she answered, as she nestled closely to her husband’s side. “No one except Arnold Langford. He called one afternoon to see your father, but as he was not at home he made me a little visit.”

“What was it he said to you?” asked Mr. Sumner. She hesitated, seeing which he added:

“It is necessary that you should tell us exactly, my darling. There are the most imperative reasons that there should be no further concealments. Some one

has committed a crime, and both Phil and I, it seems, have been accused of it. I told Arnold Langford myself that I had told you that matters at the bank made a marriage between Phil and Olive a necessity."

"He said that you had. He told me that matters looked bad for you; that the world would call your crime embezzlement, though it was his own belief that you were innocent so far as intentions were concerned. He said that he was proving his belief in you by desiring this marriage between Phil and Olive. He asked me not to speak to you of our interview, as he should not care to have you know that he had spoken upon the subject."

Phil and his father exchanged significant glances.

"Can you remember the day that this call was made?" asked Halford Sumner.

"Yes; it was the afternoon that you went to Lennox."

"And Arnold Langford asked for *me* upon the occasion of the visit?"

"Yes."

"Yet he knew that I had gone to Lennox and the business that took me."

Again the eyes of Phil and his father met, and after a moment of silence Halford Sumner remarked quietly:

"It looks singularly as if Murphy were not alone the culprit, but merely an accomplice. I think this is a case for a skilled detective."

CHAPTER XXX.

Upon the morning that followed her betrothal to Kirk Maitland, Lil was not so well. She kept her bed until noon, and then was almost ghastly in her pallor when the nurse took her to the dancing-room, where she found Chetwynd.

He had not slept and there were dark circles about his eyes, but he summoned a smile to his lips and assisted her to her chair beside the window.

Upon a stand near the window was a superb vase of orchids, and as she sat down she leaned forward and touched them caressingly.

"How lovely!" she exclaimed faintly. "You are so good to me, Chet!"

"They are not my gift," he said in a tone that was dull and hoarse and passionless. "They came from Maitland I think."

She drew back as if an adder had been concealed among them, and shivered slightly. She was tempted for a moment to order the nurse to take them away, then she leaned back in her chair wearily and closed her eyes.

Chetwynd's heart ached. It was no new sensation, but he seemed even more alive to it than usual. Still it was not self that he considered; it was only of her that he thought. He took the stand and set it aside, then drew up a chair in its place and sat down.

"Are you feeling worse, little one?" he asked tenderly.

"Only tired, Chet; that is all. I can't get a return of the old energy, try as I will."

"But *are* you trying, Lil? It seems to me that that is what the trouble is. Yesterday you were almost like yourself again, and to-day—What happened to you last night, dear, to make you do what you did—to make you false to your own heart?"

She shuddered and drew a scarf more closely about her.

"Don't talk to me now of that, old man; I have not the strength to listen. The past is all passed, Chet, and I haven't got the nerve to look into the future."

"But you must do it, child. If there were time, God knows I would willingly spare you; but you promised that in two weeks you would be—that man's wife."

The voice was harsh, bleak, unlike Chetwynd's usually musical tone, but Lil did not open her eyes.

"I know," she answered, humbly.

"But you don't love him. You know you don't love him!"

"I never said that I did."

"Yet you would be his wife. You would make of your life a legal crime? You would profanate a holy vow? Will you turn your pure life, your chaste self into a wanton that the law will recognize, but that will be denied through all ages in the holiness of heaven?"

"Pouf, Chet! You speak like a preacher. Give us a rest, will you? What difference does it make what becomes of me? Why should I care? Am I to pose before the world as the dupe of Philip Sumner? Am I to say that he deserted me to marry a richer, if not a handsomer woman than I, and that I am breaking my heart because of his perfidy? Rubbish! There

is nothing on God's earth that could make me more miserable than I am. It is the curse of my father that is upon me, and that will follow me to the day of my death. Perhaps when I am a wife he may relent."

There was a world of pathos in the last sentence, a dry, choking sob that went to the man's heart, but he cried out violently:

"But why in heaven's name have you chosen *that* man? Was it on account of that silly bet?"

"Yes—no—I don't know. That had something to do with it, of course; but—well, you see, old man, I need change of air and scene. I must get away. I am restless, feverish. I must get away! The inaction will kill me!"

"And you took him for that? You consented to be the wife of a man whom all men despise for that? Good God! You might as well have been *my* wife. At least you could have trusted me. At least you knew that I should have cherished you to the last day of your life as the most sacred thing with which Heaven could have intrusted me. I should have worshipped you and have expected nothing in return *nothing—nothing!* Your body would have been as sacred to me as your soul is pure. You would have been safe in the care of my love, as safe as if Heaven surrounded you!"

At the beginning of his speech she had opened her eyes and looked at him. But as he continued a tremendous, almost overpowering surprise grew in her expression. Gradually she sat up, clasping the arms of the chair tighter and tighter, her eyes growing larger. It was a revelation that he was making to her,

and when he had finished she could scarcely control her trembling voice to make reply.

"Chet," she whispered, "is it possible that—I am the woman whom you have loved?"

He started as if he had unintentionally betrayed a secret. A crimson glow burned for awhile in his pale cheeks, then he hung his head and answered doggedly:

"Yes, you are the woman. I never meant that you should know. I should not have spoken now only my emotion betrayed me. I love you sacredly. I love you as the saints are loved. I love you without thought or hope of return."

She sunk back in her chair. The tears were rolling over her face and down upon the lace front of her pretty *negligé*.

"Oh, Chet," she whispered, "why did you not speak sooner?"

He turned to her almost fiercely.

"Would there have been a chance for me?" he asked, hoarsely. "Is it possible that you ever could have consented?"

"Yes!" she answered, passionately. "I should have done you that great and irreparable wrong. I should have cursed your life in that wise. I should not have taken you into consideration at all, but I should have married you to escape from myself. I am glad you did not allow me to do it. I am glad I did not know. You have been so true, too staunch a friend for me to harm like that. I did not love you—I do not love you. My words may sound hard and cruel, but they are true. Now you will go away and forget me, but then you should have been always by.

"You would have seen that my heart is dead, and loving me it would have broken yours."

"Lil—Lil, it would be no wrong. It is not too late yet, dear. Tell him that you have reconsidered, and that you can not keep the promise you gave him, because your whole better self cries out against the sacrifice. Be my wife, darling. Let me save you. I swear to you that I shall demand no word, no act of obedience to my will. You shall be as sacred to me as an angel confided to my care by Heaven itself. Have mercy upon yourself, Lil, and upon me. Be my wife, dear one."

"I can't!" she grasped. "It is too late—eternally too late. I thank Heaven that I am denied the ability to do you that wrong, Chet. I can't love one man one day, promise to be the wife of another man the next, throw him over and marry a third on the day that follows. But as I am that is beyond me, I must accept the curse that my father put upon me. I must see myself wither and perish as he said. There is no hope for me, Chet, and you only make it worse by your words. For God's sake let me go, and if you love me say no more!"

She had already arisen, and as she spoke the last words she staggered blindly from the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Crushed, broken, too utterly wretched to be even capable of thought, Lil lay in her own room, not even venturing near the dancing-room lest she encounter

Chetwynd. It seemed to her that there was but one escape from the position into which her folly had placed her, and that lay in death.

And for the first time in her life she contemplated death calmly. It was the only thing that seemed to bring her peace. Not that she had thought out this solution of the situation deliberately. It was simply a means of escape that had suggested itself as unformed purpose, and yet it was fixed in her mind with a tenacity that would have surprised her had she retained the power of reasoning.

Twice the nurse entered the room and saw her lying with hands folded across her bosom and closed eyes, her face waxen and rigid, and twice she retired without the courage to speak. Then thinking that she might arouse her, the really kind woman went to her with a package of letters.

"Will you examine your mail, Miss Esmonde?" she asked, gently. "There are half a dozen boxes of flowers that have just arrived, and a basket that would test even my strength to lift."

Lil opened her eyes quietly. There was none of that awful struggle against fate expressed in her face. Her eyes were as calm as those of a child.

She took the letters and opened one or two indifferently. The nurse left her, and as soon as the door had closed the others were thrown aside and the old apathy returned. It was not long, however, until the nurse returned.

"Mr. Maitland is here," she announced, softly. "I told him that you were not so well, but he requested that you should see him if only for a moment."

A crimson flush stole into the ghastly face. It

seemed for one instant that she was about to break out in some wild refusal, then she checked herself.

"Admit him," she said, quietly.

"Here?" inquired the nurse.

"Here!" answered Lil, dully.

Her eyes were closed again and she did not hear Maitland's entrance, did not know that he was near, until he touched her gently.

She shrunk back and a cry of alarm arose to her lips, but she strangled it before it had reached the air.

"You startled me," she said dully. "I think I must have fallen asleep."

"I am so sorry," he said, tenderly. "They tell me you are not so well to-day, my darling. Ah! if love could cure you, how strong and well you would become! I am so proud and so happy, sweetheart, that it seems as if I must impart some of my own vitality to you. The day is charming; don't you think that if you were to make an effort and let me take you out for a little drive it would do you good?"

There was so much real earnestness in the tone that it touched her. There was a glimmer of tears in her eyes as she lifted them.

"Not to-day," she answered faintly. "To-morrow—perhaps."

"How good of you to give me this hope! I trust the day will be as fine as this one. I am sure it will be a world of benefit to you. Do you know what I did this morning, darling?"

She shook her head, and he laughed like a school-boy before replying.

"I engaged passage on the 'Campania' for Mr.

and Mrs. Kirk Maitland. You don't know how proud I was to write that down! The booking-clerk, whom I know, looked at me in great surprise, and I told him my joyful secret. It isn't much of a secret now, though, as every fellow at the club has been made my individual confidant. They are all having a laugh at my expense, but I can afford to let them laugh when I have all the happiness."

She was trying with all her might to keep him from seeing the anguish of her countenance; but the whitening misery spread from throat to brow and she shrunk back as if every word were a sword thrust. But he continued, with that oblivion of everything except self which had always characterized him:

"I went to the jeweler's this morning. There was nothing there that half pleased me as a ring to bind our betrothal, and so I ordered one. In the meantime I got this, simply to serve the purpose until the other could be ready."

He drew a little case from his pocket, and as he opened it a magnificent diamond flashed up at him. He took the ring out and slipped it upon her finger. In the old days such a bauble would have delighted her as much as the scintillations would have pleased a child, but she shrunk back then as if it were a band of searing iron about her finger. She took it off and laid it upon the table.

"It is very beautiful," she stammered—"too beautiful; but I can not wear rings when I don't feel well. They seem to suffocate me. You must not think me unappreciative."

"I could never think anything of you that is not

lovely. I wish I could make you understand how I adore you, darling."

"I know," she said, unable to repress a little shiver. "I am loved so—so much more—than I deserve! But I am—so tired now, Kirk. Will you—leave me for a little while?"

"May I come again to-night?"

"Not to-night—to-morrow."

"At what hour will you drive?"

"Come at two; it will be quiet then."

"All right. Lil!"

"Well?"

"Will you—will you kiss me—once?"

A wild flash of repulsive pain crossed her face. It seemed to her that to do so would be a pollution to which she never could submit. And then came the thought that she had not the right to refuse. She had promised to be his wife; it was her duty to submit to the caress that he did not demand but implored.

She looked up at him pleadingly, but there was no refusal in the expression. A more sensitive man would have understood; and perhaps he did, but did not care.

He stooped over her and pressed his lips lingeringly upon her own.

How she bore it was a mystery. The fire in her eyes glowed with a living flame, her breath was hot and sultry. She did not hear the words that he spoke to her after that; but she knew when he left the room, and for the first time a strength seemed to be lent her. She lifted herself, and with burning

rage against him and herself, in her heart, she flung out her hands.

"Oh, God! I can't—I can't!" she cried, hoarsely, passionately. "It would be a prostitution from which there would be no escape save into hell! I can't submit myself to the caresses of a man whom I loathe when the very touch of his lips scorches me like hot iron. Perdition itself could be no worse. Oh, God! what a thing I have become. It is my father's curse that is upon me—my father's curse. And I can not escape it. It will follow me to the grave and beyond it. There has not been an hour since those awful words were spoken that the sound of them has not rung through my brain, poisoning my heart and my life. They are to be my companions always—always, following me to the very door of the grave and beyond it, for it was 'through all eternity' that he said."

She fell back and covered her quivering face. There had been the light of incipient insanity in her eyes, and they burned like balls of fire as the lids closed over them. She could not bear the torture of it and lifted herself once more.

"If I were dead," she said, hoarsely, "if I were dead he might forgive me and recall it. If he saw me lying at his feet, with the white supplication of death upon my face, he might understand and recall the words that he spoke. My life is dead. There is no hope living. I will go there. At least it offers hope—hope of that future that lies with God!"

She got up and stood upon her feet. Fever lent her a false strength, and going to her dressing room she selected a gown of plain dark material and slipped

it on. She did not observe that it was sizes too large for her, on account of the flesh she had lost during her illness, or if she had observed she was in no humor to care. She pinned on a hat and wrapped a veil about her face, then let herself out of a door through her *boudoir* that led to the main hall.

The elevator-boy did not know her when he took her down, and she did not speak. She staggered into the street and hailed a hansom, ordering the driver to take her to the Grand Central Depot.

She was in time for the mid-day train to Burton, and did not pause to think that it would arrive there in the night.

She took her seat in the train and sunk back exhausted, trembling in every limb, and yet never hesitating concerning the end which seemed to beckon her invitingly.

"I shall see mother and Amy once more," she murmured, again and again. "And I shall leave the rest to God!"

That was the burden of her thoughts. She did not realize that the day was fading as the train flew on and on. She did not realize that night was coming on, and that with it a great cloud was growing in the east, and a low rumble of thunder indicated the breaking of a storm. She saw nothing, heard nothing, until at last the conductor touched her on the shoulder.

"This is Burton, madame," he said kindly. "I hope there will be some one at the station to meet you. We are an hour late, and it is raining cats and dogs!"

She scarcely heard him. She arose and staggered out into the darkness, which was irradiated now and then by a vivid streak of zigzag light that was blinding. It did not occur to her to remain there in the little station-room until the breaking of the dawn, but drawing the little scarf she wore more closely about her, she went out into the lightning and the pouring rain, with that long, lonely, country walk before her, too dazed by the bewildering voices in her brain to think of danger, too filled with anguish to dream of fear.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Neither Phil nor his father was anxious that the grass should grow under their feet in the matter of discovering the real culprit who had forged the check bearing Arnold Landford's signature and Phil's indorsement. Both understood quite well enough that the information they wanted was in the possession of Murphy, the bank teller, if they could only induce him to betray the secret he held; but how to accomplish that without giving warning to the man whom both were now forced to suspect, was a problem which neither could solve.

In their dilemma they called to their aid early the following morning a detective who had served them in emergencies before, and detailed the situation to him calmly and minutely. When the recital had been completed he threw up his hands, the interest upon his countenance intense.

"It is a plain case," he said, in a low, tense voice. "It certainly sounds the most extraordinary thing under the sun to say that Arnold Langford, a man against whom no breath of scandal has ever been raised, should have forged his own name to a check and the indorsement of your son; and yet there is absolutely no other solution of the mystery. Criminals always overreach themselves, and this gentleman overdid that when he came to your wife with the story he did in order to obtain her co-operation in the matter of his daughter's marriage with your son. But for that, I doubt if I should have suspected him so strongly. If you are willing, sir, to place the matter entirely in my hands, I think I can run the rascal to earth."

"That is exactly what I summoned you for, Clarke!" exclaimed Mr. Sumner, Sr., earnestly. "But there is one thing you must bear in mind. The day of my son's marriage is rapidly approaching. He must have an honorable reason for breaking his pledged word."

"I think he will have an honorable reason, sir," returned the detective, grimly. "Say nothing to Murphy, if you please, sir, until I request that you do so."

"I shall not act without your advice."

The detective took his leave—a man with a shrewd cast of countenance, and one who was noted for his abilities far and near. He had been successful with cases where there appeared to be no clew whatever in the beginning, and there was every confidence felt in him as he left the Sumner residence and walked leisurely down the street.

It was not later than ten o'clock in the morning, and as he looked at his watch an impulsive resolution seemed to be formed, for he wheeled suddenly and walked quickly in the other direction. He was thinking deeply, so deeply that a coachman was compelled, at a street crossing, to draw up his horses suddenly to prevent running over him; but Clarke was not thinking of such trivial things.

Whether he had formed a decisive plan of action or not, it would be impossible to say, for the expression upon his countenance was rather troubled and uncertain; still, his lips were grimly set as he mounted the stoop of a most pretentious brown-stone residence and touched the bell.

"Is Mr. Langford at home?" he asked of the servant.

"I think so, sir; but—"

"Say that it is a man who wishes to see him upon business," interrupted the detective, stepping inside the hall before the servant could decline to allow him to enter.

The imperative manner made its own impression, and the servant conducted the detective to one of the smaller reception-rooms, asking him to wait, a thing which Clarke did not in the least object to doing.

There was nothing that escaped his acute perceptions, and he observed that it was at a door almost adjoining the one in which he waited that the servant knocked.

He heard Mr. Langford's voice quite distinctly as he bid the man enter, heard the servant deliver his message, and heard the reply:

"I am engaged now, but will see him in five min-

utes if he can wait. If he can't, tell him to call at the office in half an hour."

The servant delivered his message. The detective announced his intention of waiting; then, when he had been left alone, he looked about him carefully.

At the side of the small reception-room he observed an entrance to the conservatory, and going to it, he saw that it ran down the side of the house, so that every room upon that side had an entrance to it. A smile of satisfaction crossed his countenance, and walking with a tread that was marvelously light, he entered there among the flowers and stepped noiselessly to the entrance of the other room from which he had heard Arnold Langford's voice.

There were great southern palms in luxuriant profusion about the entrance, which formed a screen that could not have been excelled, and from under their protection Clarke looked into the room.

It was the library; and beside the desk, with their backs toward the door through which the detective was looking, sat Arnold Langford and his daughter Olive. He was looking on intently while she bent over the desk and wrote with infinite care.

While Clarke held his breath and watched, she lifted her head, as if from a laborious effort, and held up a small bit of paper which Clarke had no difficulty in recognizing as a check.

Arnold Langford took it from her and looked at it critically, comparing it with another paper which he held in his hand.

"The end of the 'y' is not just right," he said, after a long pause. "The imitation is most excel-

lent, but a clever inspector could tell the difference. One more try will make it perfect, I think. Take a little care of the 'H' at the beginning of the word, and look out a little for that final 's'; it is peculiar."

"It is the most extraordinary signature I ever found," she said, wearily. "I hope this will be the last one I shall ever have to copy. It is risky as well as unpleasant."

"It will be. Old Sumner is fabulously wealthy, and as great an old fool as ever belied the name of man. Once his daughter, if you don't have every dollar he has got in six months, you are a greater fool than I take you for."

She did not reply to his speech, but shrugged her shoulders slightly and took up another blank check. She took the paper her father held and once more scrutinized the signature she was imitating, then laid the paper upon the desk before her as once again she bent over her task.

The expression of the detective's face was a marvel. It had ceased to be human as, screened by the palms, he eagerly watched the scene.

There was not a word spoken. Nothing was heard save the soft movement of the pen across the paper as the check was filled in and signed. The silence was so intense as to be almost uncanny, and once or twice Clarke found himself shivering until he feared they might hear the movement.

Then again Olive passed the paper to her father.

A gleam of satisfaction crossed his face as he gazed earnestly at it.

"It is perfect!" he exclaimed, in a low tone. "I

would defy Henry Hastings himself to say that it is not his own signature!"

Clarke started. Henry Hastings was one of the greatest millionaires in the metropolis.

"Thanks, *chérie*," Arnold Langford went on. "But for my accomplished daughter I am afraid the old dad would have been still the poorly paid lawyer that he was when her invaluable talent was discovered as a mere child."

He kissed her and arose, looking at his watch.

"I wonder if that fellow is still waiting for me?" he continued, folding the precious paper and placing it carefully in his pocket-book. "Look out for the things here, darling; I am already late."

He picked up his hat and left the room as he spoke, going into the hall with a light-hearted whistle upon his lips. He evidently looked into the rooms upon either side of the hall, and finding no one, called back:

"I guess he's gone. *Au revoir*, Olive."

"Oh! wait a minute, dad; there is something I forgot!"

She had been piling the papers into a little heap—the discarded check in which the "e's" and "s's" were not quite right, also the signature from which the other had been copied—evidently preparing to take them to her own room and destroy them. She left them there upon the desk and ran into the hall.

Quicker than thought, the detective had entered the room. He seized the pile of papers, thrust it hastily into his pocket, and before Olive Langford had reached the side of her father, Clarke had in his possession the evidences of her crime.

Noiselessly he slipped back into the conservatory, glanced hastily about him, saw the door that led to a side entrance, and as Arnold Langford let himself out to the street by the front door, Clarke, the detective, reached it by the side door.

He kept himself well out of sight until Mr. Langford entered his luxurious coupé to be driven to his office, then rapidly the detective turned again in the direction of the Sumner residence. He scarcely supposed that he would find father and son still there, but Phil was just descending the stoop slowly as the detective came up.

"Is your father here?" he asked, rather hurriedly.

"No," replied Phil; "he has gone to the office. Is there anything special? You surely can not have anything to report so soon."

"But I have. It was the greatest piece of luck that ever happened me. I have tracked the forger."

"Then it is really Arnold Langford?" asked Phil, breathlessly.

"No."

"Then who, in Heaven's name?"

"It is Arnold Langford's daughter. Olive Langford is the forger."

"Good God! You can't mean it!"

"But I do. Come with me and I will explain everything. There is not a moment to lose. Just hail that cab, will you? I haven't got breath enough left to whistle."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Phil was not long in obeying the request of the detective. They sprung into the cab, gave the bank address to the driver, with the injunction to drive fast; and as they bowled over the rough cobble-stones Clarke told the son of his employer of the phenomenal luck that had attended his visit to the home of Arnold Langford.

Phil listened in breathless astonishment; then, when the recital had been completed, exclaimed:

"What are your plans?"

"Undoubtedly the girl will communicate with her father the moment she discovers the loss of the papers, which will be immediately upon her return to the library. My plan is that you go at once to his office and prevent her seeing him or his cashing the check until I can secure a warrant for his arrest. I want to complete the evidence by having the forged check found upon him."

Phil sat there for a moment in silence, gnawing his mustache. When he spoke, both voice and manner were singularly quiet.

"I don't think the scheme is a good one."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, the publicity that will be given to it is liable to make trouble for the bank. In times like these it is not desirable that there should be a run on the bank; and you know that anything is liable to create a panic. I have no wish to advertise this thing any more than justice demands. We don't know anything about their past crimes; we can pre-

vent the one in present contemplation, so that in reality my father and I are the only sufferers. My own opinion is that we had better make him acknowledge his rascality, resign quietly from the bank, and he and his family get out of the country as quickly as possible."

The detective looked disappointed.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, dubiously, "but it always does us good to bring those fellows up with a round turn of the law. If he were a poor devil no one would think of sparing him; but—"

"It is not he so much as the bank that I am thinking of," interrupted Phil.

"I understand, sir, and I know you are right, though I confess it goes against the grain to allow him to go unpunished."

"He won't go unpunished, never fear. The disgrace will sting keenly enough."

"I don't believe much in the consciences of criminals. And it's a narrow enough escape *you've* had, sir."

"I am so grateful for that that I am afraid I am ready to allow more than I ought to the man," answered Phil, with a little grin of relief and pleasure.

"I suppose so. But here we are! This driver has made better time than I thought he could."

They sprung from the carriage, paid the driver, then entered the bank. There was an expression of natural excitement in the countenances of the two men, and as Phil passed the door of his father's office he opened it and thrust his head inside.

"Will you come with me for a moment, father?" he asked. "Clarke and I shall need you, perhaps."

Halford Sumner arose and followed them. There was an expression of interrogation upon his countenance; but the clerks were standing about, and he made neither comment nor asked questions; but Phil whispered, as they stood at the door of Arnold Langford's private office:

"We've nailed our man quicker than any of us hoped for. Clarke holds all the proofs."

Before Mr. Sumner could do more than look his surprise and pleasure, the door opened.

"Halloo, Phil!" exclaimed Arnold Langford, lightly, throwing the door wide. "Come in, my boy! I say, I hope nothing serious has occurred that you file in in such solemn procession."

Halford Sumner did not speak. He was pale to the lips, and stood leaning against the wall rather than taking the seat which Mr. Langford pushed toward him. Clarke, the detective, also stood silent, waiting for Phil to take the initiative, and, after an expressive pause, the young man stepped forward with sparkling eyes, his cheeks crimson under his excitement.

"Something serious has occurred, Mr. Langford," he said, struggling to keep his voice quite calm.

"Really!" exclaimed Langford, affably, the lightness vanishing from his manner somewhat, though no suspicion of the real truth had dawned in his mind. "You rather alarm me. Nothing concerning the bank, I hope? Clarke's presence—"

"The bank must always be more or less involved when the rascality of one of its members is discovered."

"You alarm me. Pray go on. I hope it is none of our trusted employés?"

"Murphy is interested in it," answered Phil, watching his father's partner narrowly, and noting the expression of dismay that was growing in his eyes and which he was striving powerfully to conceal. "You may be interested to know, Mr. Langford, that my father has told me the story of the forgery in which my name was associated. He assures me that Murphy said in his presence that I had presented a check bearing your signature and my own indorsement for collection. Mr. Langford, Murphy lied! I neither presented nor ever saw the check, and my name was a forgery to that precious paper as well as your own!"

Langford had grown white now, while a vivid color had leaped to the cheeks and lips of Halford Sumner.

"I confess that you surprise me, Phil; but how great the pleasure is I need not tell you," stammered Langford, uneasily.

"I've no doubt," sneered Phil. "But that is not all, sir. It is not alone Murphy who is implicated in the unfortunate affair. I believe him to be simply the tool of a more accomplished villain."

"You don't say! And whom do you suspect?"

"It is not suspicion, but certainty, Mr. Langford," announced Phil, calmly. "We have the irrefutable proof in our possession."

"You interest me," stammered the man, his voice growing hoarse and dull, his eyes becoming blood-shot under the terrible mental strain.

"You will be more interested. Mr. Langford, I will trouble you for that check in your pocket bearing the name of Henry Hastings, which your daughter Olive forged this morning."

It would be impossible to say which man appeared

the more startled at the sudden announcement, Arnold Langford or his old partner. But there was astonishment in the countenance of one; guilt, cringing shame in that of the other.

For a moment Arnold Langford stood there like the criminal at bay, then he flung up his head haughtily.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Is it the forger who is trying to play an even game? I might find some pity in my heart if you had striven to fasten a crime upon me; but—my daughter—"

"This is utterly useless, sir!" exclaimed Phil. "I tell you the proof is conclusive. Clarke was a witness of the entire scene that took place in your library this morning, and has in his possession at this moment all the papers that were used in the imitation of the signature—even to the discarded check to which you found objections, stating that there was a mistake in the formation of some of the letters. You see—"

But before he could complete the sentence the door was opened hurriedly, and Olive Langford stood upon the threshold. She was pale almost to ghastliness. She stopped suddenly as she saw who it was the room contained, but Phil stepped forward almost at once.

"Will you not come in, Miss Langford?" he said, coldly. "You have come to deliver an important message to your father. Will you not permit me to do it for you? It is that the papers which you left upon the library desk this morning while you went to speak to him for a moment in the hall have disappeared. Is not that your message, Miss Langford?"

Her face had turned from pale to a dull, greenish

blue. The lines had deepened about the mouth, and great circles had grown under her eyes.

Clarke had closed the door behind her, and she staggered back against it, her gloved hand pressed convulsively upon her bosom. No further evidence would have been required of her guilt.

Her father strove to come to her rescue.

"This is an infernal plot!" he cried, wildly. "It is a plot to cover your own crime, and—"

"We will drop all that!" commanded Phil, sternly. "You are lying to cover your infamy; but it can do no good. For the sake of the bank, and also for that of a woman who demands our sympathy only because of her sex, we are willing to spare you, provided you leave the country immediately after resigning your position here. You know our ultimatum. We will leave you to talk the matter over with your daughter; but you must decide upon your future course before you leave this building. And you must deliver to me the check which is at present in your possession. If that check is destroyed, or you decline any of my terms, you shall be at once handed over to the police, and you will be forced to stand your trial as a common criminal!"

He bowed slightly and left the room by another door, followed by his father and Clarke. They went to the office of Mr. Sumner, Sr., to await the reply of Mr. Langford and to discuss the situation; but Phil could take little interest in the future of either Arnold Langford or his daughter. There was but one thought that seemed to occupy his entire mental capacity. That was:

"I must see Lil. I will be true to my own heart

now. Thank God I have been saved from being an utter scoundrel, for her dear sake!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

With tottering steps Lil staggered out of the little station into the darkness and the storm, the fever in her veins alone giving her strength to face the battling elements. She was shivering with cold, her teeth chattering, her hands burning with the inward fire that seemed consuming her.

If she had not been familiar with every foot of the old way that she had traversed so often in childhood, she would never have reached the isolated little cabin; but she staggered on, evidently by intuition, alone. Once or twice her dragging feet caught in a stone, and she fell forward upon her face in the soft mud, and twice, when it seemed to her that her weight had grown too great for her to carry further, she sat down upon the hill-side that girted the road, oblivious of the pouring rain and the jagged lightning; then wearily, weakly, blindly, she took up the march again.

It was an indescribable feeling, that which possessed her. She seemed to have no plan formed. There was only that wild, impelling longing to get home once more, that unreasoning desire to look upon their faces; that delirious hope that her father might unsay the words that clung in her brain with maddening persistence. It may have been of the effect of the fever, perhaps was, but she never paused to question.

It never occurred to her that she was inviting death; but she would have gone on just the same if it had, for there was no terror in death for her. There had been a sudden period put after happiness for her. There was but one thought that flamed before her mental sight. It was that her father should recall the curse he had spoken, and then—oblivion!

It was a long walk—long when there were nodding flowers to look upon and with a companion by one's side; long when the trees made quaint shadows, with the sun behind them; long in the heavenly twilight of a balmy evening; but with the rain pouring in torrents, and the lightning playing in ragged flashes about one's feet, and the thunder rolling like the sound of close artillery, it seemed never ending. Still she did not give it up.

She lifted her heavy head at last, when the stray gray rays of early dawn were just stealing through the blackened sky, and in the distance saw the silent ray of a lonely candle flickering through a window.

It was like the welcome beckon of a hand from home.

She stopped under a tree and drew the light, drenched scarf about her shoulders convulsively, her breath coming in little hysterical gasps.

She tried to run, but the mud and her own weakness held her steps as if with ball and chain; but she dragged herself on wearily, never removing her eyes from that welcome candle. Once it disappeared, as if some one had carried it to the other side of the room, and a quivering sob arose to her lips; but she smiled feebly when it was returned to its place in the window.

Her clothing, heavy with rain, clung about her like

a stone to the neck of the drowning, and even the spark of false strength was exhausted ; but she dragged herself on, falling and rising, until her dearest friend would scarcely have recognized her, covered with slush and mud as she was, even the lovely auburn hair matted and blackened. And then—she reached the house, God knows how.

She crept to the side of the house, to the window in which the light rested, and, drawing herself up with the last frail remnant of ability, she looked in.

Amy was lying upon the bed, propped up with pillows, and her mother bent over her sadly, tenderly.

The sight—of home, of mother, of sister—was too much for the outcast, denied even the crumbs that fell from the table. A great, gasping sob arose to her lips. She lifted her hand and laid it against the window-pane, intending to knock ; but the ability was denied at last. She fell back, away from the window, and down, down until she lay, face downward, in the mud, the rain beating upon the back of her head in unforbidden cruelty.

It was rather later than usual that morning when Mrs. Esmonde opened the door of the kitchen, the room adjoining the one in which Amy lay. The child had been given a room on the ground-floor at her own request, because the stairs were too much for her to climb, and in the night her mother had been summoned because of one of those "bad turns" that were piteously frequent now.

It was a very changed face, that which shone out in the early morning light as Mrs. Esmonde stood there in the kitchen door. She was pale, careworn, haggard, and there were streaks of gray in the soft hair that

had not been there when Lillian was at home on her vacation visit. She stood for a moment, looking up at the still darkened sky, though the rain had ceased, then she glanced about her.

Her eye rested, with a little start, upon the human form that lay there under the window, and with a cry of alarm she went toward it quickly and lifted it up. A cry of horror left her lips that rang through the little building, bringing Jonathan Esmonde to her side.

"What is it, mother?" he demanded, as he saw her half kneeling there, supporting the body of a woman.

"For God's sake, come quick! Oh, it can't—it can't be—Lillian!"

The hardness of old Jonathan Esmonde's countenance deepened. He strode forward hastily and gazed down into the soiled face which his wife had lifted. Even in that condition it required but one glance to tell him the truth, that it was really his daughter, his first-born, who lay there like a dead thing.

"Is she—dead?" he ejaculated, hoarsely.

"No," answered the woman, with her hand upon the feebly pulsating heart. "Help me, father! Help me to carry her in. Quick!"

He lifted himself. Granite could not have been harder, colder, grayer than his face.

"Not into my house!" he exclaimed in a tone that matched his appearance. "Not into my house! I hoped she was dead, but since the Lord has denied me that, she will lay there until the town authorities take her where she belongs."

"Jonathan Esmonde, ye can't know what you air a-talkin' about!" cried the horrified woman, glancing

up at him. "Ye must be mad! This is yer own child; yer own flesh an' blood!"

"Not mine!" he exclaimed, wildly. "Never agin! She brung the first shadder o' disgrace that ever dimmed the name. She is a thing that no good woman should tech. I told ye before, an' I tell ye now, that girl is nothing to me."

"But you wouldn't turn out a dog like this!" cried Mrs. Esmonde, passionately. "Ye wouldn't turn out a dog, sick an' helpless an' homeless! Ye can't have the heart, Jonathan Esmonde! God never intended that ye should chose yer own offsprings. He give ye this one, an' ye ain't no right to disown her when she needs yer help. Help me t' carry her, Jonathan, an'—"

"Never!" he interrupted, brutally. "I tell you she shall darken no door of mine. She is a har—"

"Speak that word, an' the curse o' God be upon you!" shrieked the woman, rising suddenly and flinging out her hand dramatically. "An' even ef it was true, Jonathan Esmonde, she is *your* child just the same. Would you be the first to throw a stone after your girl into the grave? Would you be the first to stop her entrance into heaven? Whatever she is, she is your child an' mine! What did we do to make home pleasant fur her? You drove her out with your hardness an' coldness, as you are drivin' our other one into her grave. I've been obedient t' yer will, done as you've ordered, been like ye, maybe, jist as hard and stony-hearted, but you're aroused the mother in me at last, Jonathan Esmonde! What right have ye to call that house *yourn*? Ain't I toiled and worked the same as you? Ain't I shared every hardship? Ain't I

saved and scrimped and slaved from dawn till dark? Do you git all an' I git nothin'? That house is as much mine as it is yourn, Jonathan Esmonde, an' *my* daughter goes into the old room where she wus born. Ef you air ashamed to own her, *I ain't!* She's *my* child, an' ef she is denied the home that is hers by right of birth, ef, by brute force you prevent her entrance there, then I go too! I shall never darken that door again until she goes with me! I am a mother!—a mother as has her rights, though God knows she has been silent too long. Stand aside, Jonathan Esmonde! Ef you won't help me to carry the daughter that belongs to us both into the house that belongs as much to me as to you, then I can do it myself."

She lifted the frail burden in her arms, staggering under it, it is true, but never wavering in her determination. There was a look in the eyes that had never met his before, save in subservience, that the old man dared not question, and for the first time in his life Jonathan Esmonde was daunted.

He stood aside. He did not offer to touch the burden she bore. He watched her totter under it into the kitchen and disappear into Amy's room. He shivered when he heard the cry that told him Amy had recognized her sister.

He stood there, sullen, with his hands stuffed deep into his pockets—forgotten, while his wife got mustard and hastily prepared homely remedies for her eldest born; then she came into the kitchen again and took her sun-bonnet from the peg upon the wall.

"Where be ye goin'?" he asked, huskily, as she would have passed him.

"Fur the doctor!" she answered, briefly.

He put out his hand suddenly and placed it upon her shoulder.

"Go back to—*her!*" he exclaimed, dully. "She needs you. *I'll go fur the doctor!*"

CHAPTER XXXV.

From the tortures of a blind despair to the happiness of a bewildering hope is a tremendous leap, and when it comes upon one suddenly the excess is almost painful.

It was so with Philip Sumner, and when he found himself at liberty to go to Lil, to tell her of the wild joy that lay before them in the future, he could scarcely control himself, but with crimson cheeks and dancing eyes he left the bank and almost staggered into the street. He called a cab, and without the loss of a moment hurried away to the Belleamie to tell her of the joyous tidings.

One would scarcely have recognized the debonair young clubman in the wildly excited boy that sprung into the elevator and bid the boy take him to the floor upon which Lil's flat was located, and it seemed to his impatience an age before his ring at the bell was answered.

He was too much excited even to observe the aspect of confusion that hung over the apartment, but sprung quickly by the maid and entered the dancing-room, in the center of which he saw Paul Chetwynd standing.

He took the hand of the dancing-master, pressing it

warmly, and endeavoring to conceal something of his own joy out of respect for the other man's sorrow.

"I have news for you, old man," he said, striving to control his eagerness. "I know you will be glad for—for her sake. It seems the most heartless thing under heaven to expect you of all men to congratulate me, and yet I know you will from the very unselfishness of your disposition."

He paused a moment from inability to continue. A brilliant color had leaped to Chetwynd's cheeks. He grasped the young man's arm with fingers that clutched like a vice. His voice was so hoarse that Phil could scarcely understand the words that he spoke.

"Then she is with you?" he gasped. "For God's sake, speak! The suspense is almost maddening."

"With me? What do you mean?"

A wild fear had taken the place of eagerness to Phil's eyes, and he gazed at Chetwynd breathlessly.

"She has gone!"

"You can't mean Lil?"

"Yes."

"But where? Why?"

"Heaven alone knows! She was in no condition to have gone anywhere alone, being weaker and more thoroughly upset than at any time since her convalescence. Had you heard of her betrothal to Kirk Maitland?"

"Maitland? Good God, no!"

"He came to her with some infernal lie, I think. At all events, he worked upon her weakness until he had obtained her consent to become his wife. She loathed him, and I am—afraid—afraid—"

"Afraid—of what?" whispered Phil, scarcely able to control his articulation.

Chetwynd did not reply in words. He looked the younger man straight in the eye, and an awful silence followed. Phil was the first to shake off self. He seemed to be endeavoring to shake off some horrible influence, and cried out, hoarsely:

"I won't believe it. I can't believe it. Have you seen Maitland? Perhaps he knows."

"No, I have not seen him, but I am sure he knows nothing. She would never have gone to him without letting me know. There is but one hope that I can see, and that so forlorn as to be well-nigh impossible. She may have gone home. In her weakened condition it would have been next to useless for her to attempt the journey alone, and yet—"

"The clew is worth working upon!" cried Phil, clutching at any hope however frail. "I will telegraph at once to Jonathan Esmonde. Then we must see Maitland. I do not trust him, curse him!"

"Trust him?" cried Chetwynd. "I should as soon think of trusting the devil himself. There is not a moment to lose. Come!"

They left the room together, and as they went to the telegraph-office, Phil briefly outlined to this new-made friend what had taken place since he had last seen him.

Chetwynd placed his hand upon the younger man's arm with a warmth that was remarkable.

"God knows I hope you may find her!" he exclaimed with emotion. "Dearly as I love her, much of my life as she has become, I would rob neither of you

of one moment of your happiness. Oh, if this had but happened yesterday!"

They entered the telegraph office together and sent their message to Jonathan Esmonde:

"Has your daughter Lillian returned home? She has left New York suddenly and without explanation. Her friends are anxious for her safety. Please answer at once at my expense."

"PAUL CHETWYND."

The address followed, and that was all.

It arrived in Burton late in the evening and was not delivered until very nearly noon of the next day. Jonathan Esmonde was standing moodily at the gate, his arms folded upon the top, his back bent more than ever, his face graver and more haggard, when he saw the man approaching with a yellow envelope in his hand. An expression of subdued interest lighted his eyes.

"A telegram fur ye, Jonathan!" the man exclaimed. "Ain't no pervision made down thar at Burton fur deliver'n' 'em so fur, 'n ole Anthony axed me ef I wouldn't fetch it, as I wus comin' this away. Tain't nuthin' t' git skeered about. I axed Anthony what wur in it, an' he 'lowed 'twus about your darter comin' home."

Jonathan Esmonde put out his hand and took the telegram uneasily. His face had darkened again, a cold, steely determination growing in his eyes even before he had read it.

"Thankee," he said, sullenly. "They ain't got no right t' send 'em ef they can't deliver 'em."

He turned his back upon the man who had obliged

him and walked in the direction of the isolated, lonely looking house. With trembling hands he tore the message open and read it through twice, then crushed it remorselessly in his great bony hands.

A curious expression had crossed his countenance. It was such a one as a hungry wolf might have when he sees prey before him. There were streaks of blood in his eyes, his lips were white and compressed. He looked hungrily through the window of the little house.

Back a trifle from it he saw his daughter Lillian sitting in the only comfortable chair the house contained, wrapped in blankets. Her head was thrown back, and she looked with a little, tremulous, evanescent smile into the face of the mother who bent over her. At her feet Amy sat, holding the white almost transparent hand tenderly.

Jonathan Esmonde had no part in that scene. He stood alone—aloof from the only things upon earth that were dear to him. He stood there and watched with a strange gnawing at his heart—the gnawings of jealousy, the first he had ever felt in all his self-compassed life, and jealousy is the strangest of all the emotions, for it humanizes just as often as it brutalizes.

It would have been impossible to read the thoughts that traveled with wonderful rapidity through his brain, but his hand clinched more tightly over the little yellow paper, and after those long moments of inactivity and indecision, he turned away and strode quickly toward the stable.

"Saddle Black Jack, Reuben," he said, curtly. "I am a-goin' t' ride t' town."

The man had lived too long in that family to ask

questions, but did as he was bidden without a murmur. Jonathan swung himself into the saddle with surprising alacrity for one of his apparent age, and giving the horse a cut with a peach-tree switch that made little enough impression upon the thick hide, he rode out of the yard.

"I wonder where father be a-goin'?" mused Mrs. Esmonde, aloud, as she saw him swinging down the road at a gait that was remarkable for him.

Lillian lifted her head, but allowed it to fall back again wearily.

"I don't know," she said, faintly. "Oh, mother, do you suppose he will ever forgive me? Do you suppose he will ever forgive you for allowing me to come home?"

Mrs. Esmonde placed her hand gently upon the pretty hair, and kissed her daughter upon the cheek.

"Father furgive us both, dearie, when he went after the doctor," she said, tenderly. "It ain't easy fur him to say it, but it'll come in time, never fear. It wus the first time in his life that father ever furgive anybody fur anything, and he ain't learned yit to do it very neatly."

There were tears in Lillian's eyes which prevented a reply; but she would not have put much faith in her mother's words could she have seen the expression of her father's face as he rode rapidly in the direction of Burton.

His lips were still set, his eyes glassy under his determination, his grip upon the bridle an evidence of the feeling that oppressed him.

He alighted in front of the depot where the telegraph-office was located, and entered. Then in a firm

hand wrote his message, addressing it according to the directions that had been given.

"My daughter Lillian ain't here."

"JONATHAN ESMONDE."

He looked at the lie which he had written grimly, a smile of satisfaction crossing his face. He paid the amount that was demanded, and sent it upon its mission.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

But Phil had made no allowances for delays that might occur at Burton.

He tried at first to wait patiently, but as the hours lengthened, a very agony of unrest oppressed him. He dragged through a turbulent night with Chetwynd, neither of them endeavoring to sleep, and when the day broke he could bear it no longer.

Maitland appeared early in the morning for news, but neither of them was in a mood to receive him kindly, and he went about his own business, inventing means of his own for discovering the whereabouts of the woman he loved as well as his selfish nature could love any one, while Phil turned with impatient energy to Chetwynd.

"This silence, this delay, is maddening!" he exclaimed. "To endure it longer is simply impossible. I am going to Burton."

"I was just thinking of that."

"Then you will come with me?"

"No. One of us must remain here. Some one might be needed upon the spot at any moment. You go. I rather fancy there must be something of importance there, or even that old hog of a father of hers would send some sort of a reply. I will have a telegram there for you upon your arrival, detailing the news from here if there should be any, and you can send a message from there as soon as you know any thing."

"I feel as if I were deserting you."

"Nonsense! Your duty is to her, not to me."

"I wonder if there is another man in the world so unselfish as you, Chetwynd?"

"I am no different from any man who deserves the name, my boy. I love our little Lil, and her happiness is the dearest thing in all the world to me, as it would be to any man who really loved her. Do you think I would allow you to rob me of her if there were a ghost of a show that I might ever win her heart? But I know there is not. She loves you, and, thank God! I believe you are worthy of her. I know your faults perhaps as well as you do yourself, but they are not so serious that I shall fear to trust her to you if—if she is ever restored to us again."

Phil wrung the dancing-master's hand without reply in words. There was that awful, silencing fear upon him again that perhaps she was beyond them forever, a thought which he dared not, could not voice.

He took the morning train for Burton, hoping against hope, fearing, dreading, praying as he had not prayed since he was a boy kneeling at his mother's side. He was not awkward before that Great Presence as he would have been if less in earnest, but

prayed with a fervor that must have touched the ever-listening Father.

For once the train was on time when it reached Burton, and Phil's heart beat with a stifling sort of half hope as he leaped to the platform and turned hastily about him for some sort of conveyance that would take him to the home of Jonathan Esmonde.

He saw a man with a much worn buggy, and hastily accosted him.

"Take ye tu Jonathan Esmonde's!" exclaimed the old fellow, drawing in his lips and closing one eye to exclude the too great glare of the afternoon sun. "Why, Jonathan wus in town 'bout half a hour ago."

"Is he here now, do you think?"

"No. Seed him a-goin' up the pike at er gallop that 'ud done credit t' a hoss jockey. Think mebbby he wus arter the doctor. Darter's sick, they say."

"Which one? Miss Amy?"

"She's allers sick more er less. Lillian kim home t'ather night, an' they du say she kim mighty nigh hevin' neumonie. Walked home frum the station in the pourin' rain. I hearn 's morin' she's better. Wonder ef Jonathan could 'a ' bin arter the doctor?"

"Is there a telegraph-office near here?"

"Right thar in the station."

"Wait for me a moment, will you?"

Phil did not stay for a reply. He sprung toward the station and sent a telegram flying to Chetwynd:

"She is here, ill, but alive, thank God!

"SUMNER."

Then hastily he rejoined the man in the dilapidated buggy.

"I'll pay you double your price if you will make all the speed possible!" he cried, sharply. "I must get to Jonathan Esmonde's as quickly as it can be done."

Greed was a characteristic of most of the inhabitants of Burton, and this man was no exception to the general run. He whipped the poor old horse into an unusual exertion, and even then reached only a pace which would have tortured Phil had not his anxiety been somewhat relieved by the loquacious driver.

The sun was sinking in the west when the little cabin was sighted, and it seemed to the impatient lover that a palace had never looked so lovely to him as did the outline of that little log-house. He controlled his excitement, however, until they were near the house; then, unable to wait until the horse could go around by the regular road, he sprung out and walked rapidly up the foot-path that he had learned to know so well a few weeks before, and up to the little front door.

Jonathan Esmonde must have scented danger in the atmosphere, for before Phil had reached the cottage, the old man stood in the door, the expression of his face resembling nothing so much as the sharpened features of a blood-hound.

"What air you a-doin' here?" he snarled. "Ain't you done harm enough already? What air you a-comin' after now?"

"I have come to see your daughter Lillian," answered Phil, boldly.

Jonathan Esmonde stepped outside, closed the door behind him, and held the knob securely in his long-bony fingers. His lips were white and quivering with passion.

"You can't see her!" he cried, hoarsely; "you can't

see her—nuther you ner any uv yer kind. Ye tuck her away frum me; ye made her a thing that even the neighbors, common, simple folk, points at with scorn; an' when ye had done wi' her ye turned her out! She come back to her ole father, an' he is ready to pect her with all the life in his body! Ye've hounded her most t' death and now ye've come fur her ag'in; but ye can't have her! Ef ye try to pass that door, I'll kill ye as I would kill a mad dog!"

Not a word had been spoken much above a whisper. The old man was livid with rage; he shook a long, quivering finger in Phil's direction; his teeth gleaming fiercely. But the young man was not of the metal that is easily daunted. He drew himself up proudly.

"You have no right to condemn me unheard, Mr. Esmonde," he said, with a calmness born of the other man's excitement. "I have not come here to injure your daughter. On the contrary, I have come to make her an honorable proposal of marriage. You must remember me, sir. I was here to call upon her frequently during the summer, and I do not remember that you had any cause for complaint against me. I love your daughter and I am sure she loves me."

"She—loves—you!"

"I do not think I overestimate when I say she does. I should have asked her long ago to be my wife but that a barrier, removed but a day ago, stood between us."

Jonathan Esmonde looked puzzled, dumb with astonishment. He stood there for a moment, passing his thin fingers through his gray hair, then said, hoarsely, the shame growing upon his countenance: .

"Do you know who my daughter is? Have you heard the—"

"I was present at her house the evening you discovered her to be a dancer, Mr. Esmonde," said Phil, proudly; "yet, in spite of that, I have nothing but respect and reverence to offer your daughter. I know her to be as pure as an angel, and I offer testimony of that belief when I ask you now, sir, for her hand in marriage. Before you consent, it may be desirable that you should have further proof than my unsupported word of who I am; but while you are making your investigations, I beg that you will not forbid my seeing Miss Esmonde. I give you my word of honor that, if you are not satisfied with my position, socially and financially, I will consent not to see your daughter again. It is an untarnished name that I offer her."

Again Jonathan Esmonde hesitated. He could not understand it at all. He had heard the people of the village speak of Philip Sumner, knew that he was the son of the partner of Arnold Langford, whom the people of Burton looked upon as little less than a god. It was no adventurer that was asking the hand of his daughter, and yet—she was a dancer—one of those creatures whom Jonathan Esmonde and the rest of his narrow world had despised. He could scarcely credit the evidence of his own senses.

He turned away suddenly, sullenly; he flung open the door of the hall and crossed to that of the still, painfully upright parlor. Phil was close at his heels, intending to lose no opportunity. He threw open that door as well, and for the first time spoke directly to the daughter who had so offended him.

"Lillian," he said, hoarsely, something very like

tears struggling in his voice, "yer father may have been harsh t' ye in the past; but ye know ye can trust him, don't ye, child?"

A great light of joy leaped into the lovely eyes. Lillian leaned forward, a tinge of color rising to the white cheeks.

"Yes, father," she panted, not realizing what was to follow.

"Then listen. There is a man here who says he loves ye an' ye love him. Mebby it's true, an' mebby it ain't. Ye know ye air welcome to a home beneath yer father's roof all the rest uv yer life. I ain't a-sayin' that it's been a very pleasant one in the past; but, with the help o' the Lord, I'll try to make it better in the future. Ef you love this man an' want t' be his wife, I ain't got nuthin' t' say; but ef you don't, yer father is here t' pectect ye."

He stepped aside, his arms folded stiffly upon his breast, his lips shut with a tightness that sent every drop of blood from them.

Lillian looked beyond him. Her excitement could scarcely be controlled. She did not know who it was that she was to see, but a cry of joy issued from her lips that left no room for doubt when her eyes rested upon Phil's face.

He reached her side at one bound, and falling upon his knees in spite of those who witnessed, flung his arms about her waist.

"Thank God, I have found you, my darling!" he cried, passionately. "I have been well-nigh mad with fear. Don't shrink from me, Lillian—love—wife! The last barrier has been removed; nothing stands

now between us and our happiness, except the voice of man ratifying the will of God."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

There was no delay in Lil's recovery after that. There is no restorer like that which happiness brings, and she *was* happy. It seemed that there was nothing under heaven that could add to her perfect joy and content.

She had Phil! She knew that his love was wholly hers, and that his companionship was to be hers during all the years of her life. And then her father had forgiven her. He appeared to be changed, too—softened, more pliable, almost gentle. He came in one day as she sat beside the window, and with an expression upon his face that was shy as that of a school-boy, placed a handful of flowers in her lap that he had purchased from the village florist.

The tears came to her eyes for very thanksgiving. She could not speak; but he saw, understood, and bending over, kissed her upon the brow. It was more to her than the wildest demonstration would have been from another man.

And then, too, that awful fear of discovery had vanished—that terrible nightmare that had haunted the months of her later life. The horrible shadow of a lie was lifted from her life and she was free of soul again! She was no longer haunted by conscience, no longer tortured by concealments; for "concealments" are like the ghost of Banquo, that will not down.

Phil had obtained from her a not unwilling consent to an early marriage—a marriage that was to take place in the village church, without any pomp and not much ceremony. He had gone back to New York, at her request, to tell his parents himself of their engagement and to plead for their sanction.

“If my own father has despised me because of the life I lead, Phil, how much more should I expect it of yours,” she said to him, gently. “Make them understand, if you can, that I am not quite so black as I have been painted, and come to me with their consent to our union. I could never bear to rob them of you, dear.”

And he had gone.

There was not much difficulty in gaining their consent. They felt that something was due him for the pain that they had unintentionally made him suffer, and an even greater amount of confidence in him had been established than ever before.

“If you feel that your happiness depends upon this marriage, my son,” his mother said to him as he knelt by her side, “I have no objection to urge. Your happiness is our consideration in life, our one desire, and—we trust you.”

He kissed her gently.

“That is like my own little mother,” he said, tenderly. “And you will come to our wedding? You will meet her before she becomes my wife?”

“Yes, my darling. I will go to your wedding, and I will try to feel that I am gaining a daughter instead of losing my son.”

“That you never could do, dear little one! You have the right and title by deed of gift to your place

in my heart, of which not even death could rob you."

Then he arose to grasp his father's hand.

"I confess you have surprised me," the elder man said. "I will not deny that I should have preferred another selection; but, after all, you are the only one to be consulted. You are no longer a boy. But is there not a rumor at the club that Kirk Maitland is the betrothed husband of this lady?"

Phil's face flushed.

"I think there may be," he replied, a little sternly; "but the rumor will be quickly corrected. The scoundrel has tried in every way that lies in his power to come between us, hesitating at no lie that would accomplish his end; but it has failed, thank Heaven. He took advantage of my engagement to Miss Langford to work upon Lillian's feelings until he did obtain some sort of promise from her while she was under the influence of delirium. By the way, has Arnold Langford sailed yet?"

"He goes on the 'Etruria,' on Wednesday of next week. I never saw a man so completely crushed and broken."

"You can not expect that I shall have sympathy?"

"Certainly not. I consider him the calmest and most dastardly villain that I have ever known; but, as Clarke says, he overreached himself at last."

"The family go with him?"

"Oh, yes! Olive seems to take her disgrace very much more easily than the old man does. It would not surprise me to hear of her engagement to some nobleman or other in the near future."

"It would seem a heinous crime to permit a man to marry her," said Phil, musingly.

"You are right," assented his father; "and yet, what is one to do? We can't destroy the only hope of reformation for her."

Phil shrugged his shoulders lightly.

"There will never be a reformation of conscience with her," he said, quietly. "Lack of necessity, of opportunity, may prevent her doing it again, but that is all. If she should marry a rich man, it may be that she will commit no further crimes, but the old stain will be there forever."

It was a pretty wedding that which took place in the village church a month later. Indian summer had set in. The trees were green and yellow and red with the superb shading of glorious autumn. The air was balmy with the intoxicating elixir of old wine. It crept into the veins, almost oppressing one with the sweetness of happiness and of hope and of rest.

The simple little frame church was decorated by the village maidens, and while there might have been a more artistic arrangement of vines and flowers by a florist who was an adept in the business, there could have been nothing sweeter.

There was neither bride-maids, maids of honor, nor ushers. People found their seats for themselves, "first come, first served," and long before the hour appointed the little edifice was filled to the doors.

There was no organ to peal forth the wedding march, but the villagers noticed that about five minutes before the bridal party entered Amy came in leaning heavily upon the arm of a very pale but very erect man who had arrived the evening before. They sat down in a pew that had been reserved for the

families of the contracting parties, and Amy leaned toward him.

"Isn't the church lovely?" she asked, enthusiastically. "Lillian's friends did it all. Oh, Mr. Chetwynd, I didn't think that morning when she came home that we should ever be so happy again as this. You heard of it, didn't you?"

"Yes," he assented, even his whisper a trifle husky. "Sumner told me."

"Isn't he the most charming man!" continued Amy, scarcely able to repress her excitement. "We met him here in Burton, you know, when my sister was home for her vacation. I was simply crazy for her to marry him then, and now to think she is really going to do it!"

"He is a charming man."

"That doesn't half express it. He is the most lovely man in the whole world! He is going to take Lily to Egypt and the Holy Land, and to Persia and Russia, and—oh, everywhere in the whole world! And—I wonder if I may tell you a secret, Mr. Chetwynd?"

He looked at her and smiled. There was a world of sadness in it; but in spite of her sympathy for every human thing, Amy was too happy to see.

"Do you think that I am worthy of trust?" he asked quietly.

"Indeed I do. Lillian has told me a great deal of you, and of how royally good you have always been to her. Well, my secret is this: while she is gone away—abroad, you know—I am to go back to the New York Hospital for treatment. The doctors told me when I was there before you know, that they could make me almost as good as new. I don't want

Lillian to know a thing about it, but to find me well when she returns. And what do you think? Father is going to send me!"

"Is he?"

"Yes. He is the most changed man you ever saw in all your life. They say it is an ill wind that blows no one good, but I think there was never an ill wind in all this world that has blown so much good as this one. Hush! there they are."

There was never anything simpler than the ceremony. Lillian was not even in the conventional white of bridal robes, but wore a traveling costume that had been sent to her by one of her old New York dress-makers. It was dainty and beautiful, and as artistic as it was charming.

There was never a happier nor a handsomer man than Philip Sumner, as he stood before the country clergyman, promising, with a fervor and earnestness that was touching, to love and protect the dainty, exquisite girl that stood by his side through all the years of their lives.

It was over at last, and the old-fashioned congratulations were being spoken by the country-folk.

Halford Sumner stood a little apart with his little blind wife, she with tears in her pretty blue eyes. He leaned toward her a trifle as he whispered:

"Darling, how I wish that you could see Phil's wife—our new daughter. She is the most beautiful girl I ever saw, I think, save the little one that became my bride so many years ago."

"And as charming as she is beautiful, Halford."

"Yes, dear. I have no fault to find with Phil's

choice. The world may smile, but Phil will laugh with happiness."

Mr. and Mrs. Philip Sumner were to return to New York by private car in time to catch the outgoing steamer for Liverpool. The station platform was filled with people, handkerchiefs were waving, good-byes being shouted, kisses thrown. Beside the vestibule Chetwynd stood, and it was his hand that Phil grasped the last.

"Good-bye, old friend," he said, with a little tremulous tone fluttering through his voice; "true as Damon! God bless you! There will always be a place at my fireside preserved for you!"

"Be worthy of her," Chetwynd returned, below his breath. "It is the only request I have to make."

Then he kissed Phil upon the cheek.

"*Au revoir*, little one," he said, forcing his voice to be calm. "Don't forget old Chet in all your happiness."

She looked at him a trifle wistfully.

"Forget you!" she answered, brokenly. "You have been too much to me for that—everything, almost. I wish I could tell you—"

She could not complete the sentence in words, but he understood, and as the train rolled away he stood there staring after it, his eyeballs burning with the agony he was too loyal to acknowledge even to himself.

He turned to Amy with a smile and drew her hand closely through his arm to assist her back to the carriage.

RETURN TO the circulation desk of any
University of California Library
or to the
NORTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
Bldg. 400, Richmond Field Station
University of California
Richmond, CA 94804-4698

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

- 2-month loans may be renewed by calling (510) 642-6753
 - 1-year loans may be recharged by bringing books to NRLF
 - Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior to due date.
-

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

JAN 20 1998

YB 75641

970409

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

THE HART SERIES

Jean Libbey
M. Braeme

Miss Caroline Hart
Barbara Howard

Mrs. E. Burke Collins
Lucy Randall Comfort

Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller
Marie Corelli

Was there ever a galaxy of names representing such authors offered to the public before?
If of writing stories that arouse the emotions, in sentiment, passion and love, their books excel any that have ever been written.

NOW READY

- Snapped at the Altar, Laura Jean Libbey.
- Adiolia's Two Lovers, Laura Jean Libbey.
- Lil, the Dancin', Grl., Caroline Hart.
- The Woman Wh. Car e Between, Caroline Hart.
- Aleta's Terrible Secret, Laura Jean Libbey.
- For Love or Honor, Caroline Hart.
- The Romance of Enola, Laura Jean Libbey.
- A Handsome Engineer's Flirtation, Laura J. Libbey.
- A Little Princess, Caroline Hart.
- Was She Sweetheart or Wife, Laura Jean Libbey.
- Nameless Bess, Caroline Hart.
- Della's Handsome Lover, Laura Jean Libbey.
- That Awful Scar, Caroline Hart.
- Flora Garland's Courtship, Laura Jean Libbey.
- Love's Rugged Path, Caroline Hart.
- My Sweetheart Idabell, Laura Jean Libbey.
- Married at Sight, Caroline Hart.
- Pretty Madcap Dorothy, Laura Jean Libbey.
- Her Right to Love, Caroline Hart.
- The Loan of a Lover, Laura Jean Libbey.
- The Game of Love, Caroline Hart.
- A Fatal Elopement, Laura Jean Libbey.
- Vendetta, Marie Corelli.
- The Girl He Forsook, Laura Jean Libbey.
- Redeemed by Love, Caroline Hart.
- A Wasted Love, Caroline Hart.
- A Dangerous Flirtation, Laura Jean Libbey.
- A Haunted Life, Caroline Hart.
- Garnetta, the Silver King's Daughter, L. J. Libbey.
- A Romance of Two Worlds, Marie Corelli.
- Her Ransom, Charles Garvice.
- A Hidden Terror, Caroline Hart.
- Flora Temple, Laura Jean Libbey.
- Claribel's Love Story, Charlotte M. Braeme.
- Pretty Rose Hall, Laura Jean Libbey.
- The Mystery of Suicide Place, Mrs. Alex. Miller.
- Cora, the Pet of the Regiment, Laura Jean Libbey.
- The Vengeance of Love, Caroline Hart.
- Jolly Sally Pendleton, Laura Jean Libbey.
- A Bitter Reckoning, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.
- Kathleen's Diamonds, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- Angela's Lover, Caroline Hart.
- Lancaster's Choice, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- The Madness of Love, Caroline Hart.
- Little Sweetheart, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- A Working Girl's Honor, Caroline Hart.
- The Mystery of Colde Fell, Charlotte M. Braeme.
- The Rival Heiresses, Caroline Hart.
- Little Nobody, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- Her Husband's Ghost, Mary E. Bryan.
- Sold for Gold, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.
- Her Husband's Secret, Lucy Randall Comfort.
- A Passionate Love, Barbara Howard.
- From Want to Wealth, Caroline Hart.
- Loved You Better Than You Knew, Mrs. A. Miller.
- Irene's Vow, Charlotte M. Braeme.
- She Loved Not Wisely, Caroline Hart.
- Molly's Treachery, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- Was It Wrong? Barbara Howard.
- The Midnight Marriage, Mrs. Sumner Hayden.
- Ailsa, Wenona Gilman.
- Her Dark Inheritance, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.
- Viola's Vanity, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- The Ghost of the Hurricane Hills, Mary E. Bryan.
- 69—A Woman Wronged, Caroline Hart.
- 70—Was She His Lawful Wife? Barbara Howard.
- 71—Val, the Tomboy, Wenona Gilman.
- 72—The Richmond Secret, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.
- 73—Edna's Vow, Charlotte M. Stanley.
- 74—Heart's of Fire, Caroline Hart.
- 75—St. Elmo, Augusta J. Evans.
- 76—Nobody's Wife, Caroline Hart.
- 77—Ishmael, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth.
- 78—Self-Raised, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth.
- 79—Pretty Little Rosebud, Barbara Howard.
- 80—Inez, Augusta J. Evans.
- 81—The Girl Wife, Mrs. Sumner Hayden.
- 82—Dora Thorne, Charlotte M. Braeme.
- 83—Followed by Fate, Lucy Randall Comfort.
- 84—India, or the Pearl of Pearl River, Southworth.
- 85—Mad Kingsley's Heir, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.
- 86—The Missing Bride, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth.
- 87—Wicked Sir Dare, Charles Garvice.
- 88—Daintie's Cruel Rivals, Mrs. Alex. McV. Miller.
- 89—Lillian's Vow, Caroline Hart.
- 90—Miss Estcourt, Charles Garvice.
- 91—Beulah, Augusta J. Evans.
- 92—Daphne's Fate, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.
- 93—Wormwood, Marie Corelli.
- 94—Nellie, Charles Garvice.
- 95—His Legal Wife, Mary E. Bryan.
- 96—Macaria, Augusta J. Evans.
- 97—Lost and Found, Charlotte M. Stanley.
- 98—The Curse of Clifton, Mrs. Southworth.
- 99—That Strange Girl, Charles Garvice.
- 100—The Lovers at Storm Castle, Mrs. M. A. Collins.
- 101—Margerie's Mistake, Lucy Randall Comfort.
- 102—The Curse of Pocahontas, Wenona Gilman.
- 103—My Love Kitty, Charles Garvice.
- 104—His Fairy Queen, Elizabeth Stiles.
- 105—From Worse than Death, Caroline Hart.
- 106—André Fane's Love, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.
- 107—Thorns and Orange Blossoms, Charlotte Braeme.
- 108—Ethel Dreeme, Frank Corey.
- 109—Three Girls, Mary E. Bryan.
- 110—A Strange Marriage, Caroline Hart.
- 111—Violet, Charles Garvice.
- 112—The Ghost of the Power, Mrs. Sumner Hayden.
- 113—Baptised with a Curse, Edith Stewart Drewry.
- 114—A Tragic Blunder, Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron.
- 115—The Secret of Her Life, Edward Jenkins.
- 116—My Guardian, Ada Cambridge.
- 117—A Last Love, Georges Ohnet.
- 118—His Angel, Henry Hermer.
- 119—Pretty Miss Bellew, Thos. Gift.
- 120—Blind Love, Wilkie Collins.
- 121—A Life's Mistake, Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron.
- 122—Won By Waiting, Edna Lyall.
- 123—Passions Slave, King.
- 124—Under Currents, Duchess.
- 125—False Vow, Braeme.
- 126—The Belle of Lynne, Braeme.
- 127—Lord Lynne's Choice, Braeme.
- 128—Blossom and Fruit, Braeme.
- 129—Weaker Than a Woman, Braeme.
- 130—Tempest and Sunshine, Mary J. Holmes.
- 131—Lady Muriel's Secret, Braeme.
- 132—A Mad Love, Braeme.

The Hart Series books are for sale everywhere, or they will be sent by mail, postage paid, for 30 cents a copy, by the publisher; 4 copies for \$1.00. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY.

Chas. and John U.S.A.